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POSTHUMOUS WORKS

OF THE

REV. RALPH WARDLAW, D.D.

EDITED BY HIS SON,

THE REV. J. S. WARDLAW, A.M.

VOL. II.

A. FULLARTON & CO.:
44 SOUTH BRIDGE, EDINBURGH;
AND 115 NEWGATE STREET, LONDON.

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L E C T U R E S

ON

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

BY THE

REV. RALPH WARDLAW, D.D.

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SECOND EDITION.

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A. FULLARTON & CO.:
EDINBURGH, LONDON, AND DUBLIN.

1869.

EDINBURGH :
FULLARTON AND MACNAB, PRINTERS, LEITH WALK.

LECTURE XXXV.

PROV. XIV. 25—31.

“A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies. In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence; and his children shall have a place of refuge. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death. In the multitude of people is the king's honour: but in the want of people is the destruction of the prince. He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly. A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones. He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.”

“A TRUE witness *delivereth souls*.” The words might be rendered with greater propriety, and wider comprehensiveness—“a true witness *saveth lives*.” But it may be said, and said justly, that a faithful testimony does not always *save* life. Such a testimony may evidently condemn a man as well as acquit him. It depends entirely, not on the fidelity of the witness, but on the facts of the case. If the facts are *criminatory*, a true witness must tell them as they are—“the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,”—and the fault rests not with him that his testimony warrants a sentence of condemnation. The duty of giving such evidence may often be most painful; but the “true witness” must submit to this: the truth *must* be told.—And while true testimony may condemn, false testimony may acquit; while the former may destroy life, the latter may save it. Many a time has a false and perjured witness brought off a pannel that was guilty and deserved the punishment pronounced by the law against the offence charged,

It is probable, therefore, that the intended antithesis relates, not so much to the *actual fact* of truth saving and falsehood condemning, as to the *dispositions and intentions* of the faithful witness on the one hand, and the lying witness on the other. The faithful witness delights in giving testimony that will save life—that will be salutary and beneficial to his fellow-creatures. The lying witness will, in general, be found actuated by a malevolent and wicked purpose, having pleasure in giving testimony that will go to condemn the object of his malice. The sentiment will thus be, *that truth is most generally found in union with kindness of heart, and falsehood with malevolence.* And this is natural; the former being both good, the latter both evil; falsehood more naturally akin to malice, and truth to love. “A *deceitful* witness” is evidently not intended to be understood of a witness who deceives for the *good* of others. A man may occasionally deceive for such a purpose; but this is the exception, not the rule. The deceitful man deceives for his own advantage:—while the man of truth regards not the results, whether to others or to himself; but, be they painful or pleasant, considers only what fidelity and veracity demand of him: not things as he may *wish* them, but things *as they are*.*

Verse 26. “In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence; and his children shall have a place of refuge.”

He who fears God, according to the revelation He has given of himself, may well have “*strong confidence.*” That in which he confides is all infinite:—the truth, the love, the wisdom, the power of his covenant God! What confidence shall be strong, if this is not strong? The God whom he fears and loves (for in the Scripture sense he cannot fear without loving) has given, in the name of his Son, “*exceeding great and precious promises;*”—precious in themselves, in the fulness of blessing, for time and for eternity, which they contain; precious, as given by divine fidelity; precious, as pledged and made sure of fulfilment

* Comp. chap. vi. 19; xii. 17; xiii. 5.

by all the resources of divine wisdom and divine power. Whatever the love of God has induced Him graciously to promise, no power or combination of powers in existence can stay from being done.

The psalms abound with expressions of confidence, corresponding with the phraseology of the latter part of the verse—"And his" (the Lord's) "children shall have a place of refuge." This does not mean merely that God in His providence will see to their protection and preservation in seasons of danger and calamity—true though that is, but that, to them, as His children, HE HIMSELF will be "as a hiding-place from the storm, and a covert from the tempest;" so that they shall fully realize the security; and, in the enjoyment of "perfect peace," say with the prophet, "The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in HIM," Nah. i. 7.

What is before said (chap. xiii. 14.) of "*the law of the wise*," is in next verse said of "*the fear of the Lord*." "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death."

There is a perfect and beautiful harmony between the two. "The law of the wise," is the great practical principle by which their whole character is formed and their whole conduct regulated, and that principle is "the fear of the Lord." And if the "law of the wise" be interpreted in the former passage, more generally, of the *divine word*, which the wise take as the "light of their feet and the lamp of their path," the authoritative guide of all their ways,—what, we still ask anew, is the leading lesson of that very word? Is it not that the *fear of the Lord* is *wisdom*, and the *beginning* of wisdom? Is not the very purpose of God's word to reveal Him to guilty men in the appropriate character of the God of their salvation? And is not the very purpose of the manifestation of God's mercy to rectify the state of the heart toward Him? Is there not "forgiveness with Him *that He may be feared*?"

Now "this fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death." From these it effectually pre-

serves; while they who have it not are “broken and snared and taken”—led astray to their destruction—“entangled and overcome.” All the streams that flow from this fear are streams of life—waters of joy. And when the principle is perfected above—when every foreign and bitter ingredient is separated from the fountain—when all that is impure is filtered out—how sweet will be the waters! The untainted fountain of holiness will then indeed prove itself “a fountain of life”—a spring of eternal and unmingled blessedness. O! is not true religion, we again ask,—is not the “fear of the Lord” true wisdom? Would you be wise—prudently and practically wise—wise as it respects your own happiness? choose it for *your law*; disown every other; resist every interfering and counteracting influence, every temptation to throw off its salutary dominion, and say, with full determination of spirit—“I FEAR GOD, AND KNOW NO OTHER FEAR!”

Verse 28. “In the multitude of people is the king’s honour: but in the want of people is the destruction of the prince.”

There is a natural tendency in the population of a country to increase; and, according to the estimates of some political economists, (into the discussion of which it would be inconsistent both with place and time to enter) to increase in a more rapid ratio than the means of subsistence. When, therefore, population, instead of thus increasing, diminishes, there must be some cause or causes *counterworking nature*. The subjects of the country may be wasted in destructive and depopulating wars; they may be driven by oppression to quit their native land, and to seek a refuge in other and distant regions; they may be starved and reduced by measures that are injurious and ruinous to trade, and especially to the industry and comfort of the artisan—measures that keep up the price of bread, and depress the wages of labour; and may thus be necessitated to seek an easier and a more abundant subsistence for themselves and their families, elsewhere.

There may be circumstances in providence, let it be

granted, over which no Government can exercise any control, which may contribute to the production of similar results. But no Government that is desirous of its only real stability—a thriving, vigorous, well-educated, happy, and loyal population, will trifle with those laws which manifestly and essentially tend either to its production on the one hand or to its diminution and extermination on the other. Such a population, as Solomon here teaches, is the glory and the strength of every Government. Its existence is a mark of freedom, of wise and impartial legislation, of paternal care;—and it is the palladium of all that is desirable in the results of human rule. It is the honour and the security of a country. Such a population will be jealous of the liberties and the blessings they enjoy, and will maintain, with unanimity of resolution and vigour, the throne and the laws under which they are enjoyed.

On the contrary, in a thin, diminishing, scattered, discouraged, and heartless people, whence is the power of protection and defence to come? They can feel no interest and no energy in repelling aggression, and protecting from injury and hazard, that from which they derive so very little good. Go where they will, they naturally think, the change cannot be materially for the worse. There may, however, be circumstances, which, even in a free, thriving, and happy country, may at times render the emigration of individuals and families desirable; and when those who take leave of their country itself go to the colonies, more or less distant, of that country, they may still be regarded as belonging to “the multitude of the people”—the “king’s honour.” They remain among his subjects, and may contribute more to the prosperity of the land they leave than they would have done by remaining at home; just as a man may do better for himself and family, and better contribute his little quota to the prosperity of the community, by shifting his place and changing his occupation, within the country itself.

The prince who reigns over a numerous, thriving, contented, and attached people, may be likened to the proprietor of a vineyard where all is rich, flourishing, fruitful, produc-

tive; thus fully rewarding his expense, time, and care,—bringing him at once *credit* and *profit*. Whereas the prince who sways his sceptre over a draining, exhausted, and dispirited people, is like the proprietor whose vineyard, for want of cultivation and judicious management, becomes, in its vines, stunted and sapless, and, in its soil, weedy, poor, and sterile,—at once his disgrace and his ruin.

The sentiment of the following verse is a kindred one to that in verse seventeenth—"He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly." The man whose resentments, instead of quickly kindling are slow of excitement, may, by the men of the world, be censured and despised, as tame and spiritless. But after all, this self-command is true greatness of mind,—one of the marks of a powerful intellect. Hasty and violent tempers make their subjects often both to say and do things that cause subsequent regret and shame. Thus "he that is hasty of spirit *exalteth folly*." He gives folly for the time being the throne and sceptre of his mind, and fulfils her preposterous and mischievous dictates. And when reason, for the time deposed, resumes her vacated seat, she finds no easy task before her to repair the evils which have been done in the brief but stormy reign of passion. But the subject has been already more than once before us. I dwell not on it.

Verse 30. "A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones."

The word *sound* signifies *healthful*; free from *moral distempers*—the distempers of "the inner man:" such distempers as discontent, malice, and envy. And here "a *sound* heart" stands in constrast with a heart under the power of the *last* of these. And the influence of each on the general constitution, and even on the welfare of the body, is strongly set forth.

Strictly speaking, "a sound heart"—a heart entirely free from the evil passions that belong to fallen nature—is not to be found. But in Scripture "a *sound* heart," and even "a *perfect* heart," are phrases used to signify the real sincerity and predominant rule of right principles and affections. Of

the corruption of human nature, to which I have referred, the passions noticed are parts and modifications; and of all the malignant influences of which the heart can be the subject, that of "*envy*" is perhaps the most odious in itself, and the most corroding, torturing, and wasting to the spirit of which it takes possession. It is here called "*the rottenness of the bones*"—not a mere *surface sore*, but a deep-seated disease; like *caries* or inflammation in the substance of the bone itself. It burns and destroys inwardly. Its poor agonized victim writhes in misery at every report that reaches his ear of the success or prosperity of the object of his mal-evolence; or even of the elevation and progress of others in general. And the connexion is intimate between mind and body,—between the spirit and the tabernacle in which it resides. They mutually affect each other. When such a passion preys upon the heart, the body will sicken, pine, and consume—the appetite failing, and the flesh wasting away. On the contrary, there is not a more effectual preservative of the health and vigour of the physical frame, than a contented and cheerful spirit,—a spirit that shares the happiness of all around, and makes every stream of enjoyment that gladdens the heart of others tributary to the river of its own pleasures. This, instead of *rottenness*, is *marrow* to the bones.

Verse 31. "He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor."—We had a similar sentiment before us in last lecture. I then mentioned, amongst other views of the sin, that scorn of the poor was contempt of the appointments of divine providence. The idea here corresponds with this.

"*Oppression*," however, is something more than contempt or neglect. It is the using of superiority and power with rigour and severity; taking advantage of the dependence of the poor to "*grind their faces*;" exacting their hard toil for an inadequate compensation; adding to their work, and screwing down their wages; making necessity on their part the reason, not for treating them gently, but for dealing hardly and cruelly by them.

He who acts such a part to the poor, "*reproacheth his Maker.*" For first, he acts as if the poor were of another species—an inferior order of beings; whereas they have all the attributes of the same manhood with him by whom they are condemned. It is kindred blood that flows in the veins of both; their constitution of soul and body is the same; their sensibilities are the same; the sources of their joys and sorrows, their pains and pleasures are the same; their eternal destinies are the same; their ruin by sin is a common ruin,—the salvation provided for them by Christ a common salvation. And further, because he acts as if the circumstances in which the poor had been placed by his Maker were a warrant for him to imitate the divine conduct, and to depress them still further; which is a *reproach* of God, as if He dealt with the poor in the spirit of unkindness and partiality, and meant His own dealings as a signal for fellow-creatures to withhold good and to inflict evil, instead of intending to present occasions for the exercise of the very opposite dispositions and conduct.

On the contrary—"he that *honoureth him*"—that is, God, "*hath mercy on the poor.*" The inverse of course holds—that he who "*hath mercy on the poor* honoureth God." And yet, perhaps, this may be questioned, unless duly explained and guarded. A man may have mercy on the poor who does *not* "*honour God.*" Humanity may, and often does, exist without godliness. But godliness cannot exist without humanity. No man can honour God without "*having mercy on the poor:*"—and it will be well for both descriptions of persons to examine themselves. The humane and merciful man should examine, whether he has any consideration of the glory of God in what he is doing; whether his benevolence springs at all from, or has any connexion with, piety: and the professedly pious and godly, those who say they have the glory of God at heart, do well to reflect whether this be one of the ways in which their regard for God's glory manifests itself.

Jesus—who of all that ever lived on earth honoured God most, showed most of mercy to the poor. This was prophe-

sied of him;* and the prophecy was amply verified in his entire life on earth. The poor were ever around him. He was ever dispensing to them temporal good, and ever vouchsafing to them his gracious and saving instructions. It was at once the delight of his heart, and one of the proofs of his Messiahship, to be able to say, in connexion with the enumeration of his miraculous works—"And to the poor the gospel is preached." He, therefore, who most imitates *him*, most honours God;—for *him* God "delighteth to honour," and delighteth to see honoured; and those who most resemble him will have most of God's blessing.

Let me close by remarking that they do not imitate aright either Jesus or the Father that sent him, who confine their imitation to mere outward, present, temporal good. Vast was the amount of such good scattered around him by Jesus when on earth; but not for that purpose did he come from heaven. He had a higher errand. That errand was salvation. Men were spiritually poor—destitute for eternity; and herein is the signal "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for *our* sakes he became poor, that *we* through his poverty might be rich,"—not rich in the wealth of this world, but rich in spiritual blessings, rich in the divine favour, rich in the promises of God's covenant, rich as heirs of "the better country, even the heavenly," rich in GOD HIMSELF. Do you pity, then, the spiritual destitution of mankind? Do you seek to relieve and supply their wants? Otherwise you honour not God. You *dishonour* Him. You are not of one mind either with Him or with his Son. It was to provide for the wants and woes spiritual and eternal of mankind, that the whole scheme of the mediation of Christ was devised and carried out. And if, professing to pity the poor, you confine your mercy to their temporal condition, you are really "reproaching their Maker"—reproaching Him as having done a needless thing, as having expended an immense amount of the most marvellous means, for accomplishing an end which you do not think it worth your while

* Comp. Psal. lxxii. 4, 12--14.

to mind, either for yourselves or for others. Your benevolence is spurious. It is not the benevolence of God. It is not the benevolence of CHRIST. It is not the benevolence of wisdom or prudence. It is the benevolence of the physician, who should expend all his care and skill on the binding up of a bruised finger, while he left a deadly malignant distemper preying unheeded on the very vitals. If you honour God, you will act as God acts. The souls and eternal interests of men will be highest in your estimate, and first in your attention. To make men "rich toward God" will be your chief concern. And to those who mind their temporal interests, while they overlook those that are spiritual and eternal, we would say, in the terms of Jesus on another subject—"This ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." If you would honour God, you must seek to fill this impoverished world with "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

LECTURE XXXVI

PROV. XIV. 32—35.

“The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death. Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding: but that which is in the midst of fools is made known. Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people. The king’s favour is toward a wise servant: but his wrath is against him that causeth shame.”

THE first of these verses might be specially applied to the characters in the verse preceding—on the one hand, the unmerciful oppressor who has for a time succeeded in his schemes of rapacity and iron-hearted avarice, and the merciful man on the other, who, under the influence of the principles of faith and love, has honoured the Lord in the exercise of compassionate kindness.

We take the verse, however, in application to the *righteous* and the *wicked* generally. When it is said of the latter—“The wicked is driven away in his wickedness,” the contrast in the close of the verse shows to what period the words refer. It is to the time of *death*. And the contrast, though briefly stated, is very striking. The two characters are brought, as it were, to the verge of eternity. Of one the whole heart, in all its affections and desires, has belonged to the present world. He has lived in the pleasures of sin, “without God,” neglecting the salvation of his soul, and in utter destitution of any well-founded hope for futurity. His heart fails him. Conscience sets his sins in dread array before him. Imagination, stimulated by conscience, anticipates the terrors of a coming judgment—the vengeance of a holy

God. Yet his heart is still carnal, hard, unyielding; his iniquities are unrepented; his evil lusts and habits remain in their full force. How he clings to life!—what a death-grasp he keeps of this world! Unprepared for the world beyond, he shrinks back from it; he dares not look into it. O what would he give—what would he *not* give for a little longer lease of time! for but a year, a month, a week, a day! But go he *must*. It is anything but willingly. He goes by force. He is “*driven away in his wickedness*”—compelled to quit his hold of the world, and hurried into eternity.

“*But the righteous hath hope in his death.*” He is *not* driven away. The world that is before him, and on which he is about to enter, has been anticipated by him. It is not strange to his mind. It is his country; it is his home. The present world he has not regarded as *his* world, the world to which he belongs. The next is properly his—the place of his future and eternal settlement. While here, he is a stranger and foreigner,—staying only for a short season, and journeying towards his destined abode. The world to which his hope looks forward has attractions far superior to that in which he now dwells. Not that he is insensible to tender and strong attachments drawing and binding him to the scene he is about to leave. He loves his friends; his wife and children are dear to his heart; and so are father and mother, brothers and sisters; and fellow-Christians,—one with him in the communion of saints; with whom he has “*taken sweet counsel,*” “*walking with them to the house of God in company:*” and he feels at the thought of leaving them. But he has friends in heaven too—earthly friends who have gone thither before him—patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs—all the saints of God from Abel to himself; and above all, his best, his *divine* friend. And there too are better, and higher, and purer blessings—the sinless perfection of those which he has tasted and learned to relish here below.—And then, with regard to all in whom he is interested on earth, he has a covenant God in whose hands he can leave them with firm and steadfast faith, the living faith of a dying hour, and sing—

“Ye fleeting charms of earth, farewell,
 Your springs of joy are dry:
 My soul now seeks another home,
 A brighter world on high.

Farewell, ye friends, whose tender care
 Has long engaged my love:
 Your fond embrace I now exchange
 For better friends above!

Cheerful I leave this vale of tears,
 Where pains and sorrows grow;
 Welcome the day that ends my toil,
 And every scene of woe!”

Many now present can bear testimony to the fact that “the righteous hath hope in his death;” and amongst them some who have been recently called to mourn the departure of one of the oldest members of the Church—one dear to a large circle of affectionate relatives; a Christian of long standing, and approved character; and one whose sun, though it went down somewhat suddenly, yet set without a cloud.—“Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!” Is this *your* wish, my hearers? Then you must live the *life* of the righteous, under the influence of the *faith* of the righteous.

Verse 33. “Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding: but that which is in the midst of fools is made known.” The meaning is not, of course, that the man of “understanding” makes *no use* of his “wisdom” for the benefit of others,—keeping it all to himself—all locked up in his own mind; but that he uses it discreetly. He chooses his time and his company, unfolding his mental treasures at appropriate seasons, to appropriate persons, in appropriate circumstances. The fool has little, and that little he is anxious to show, ever seeking to be thought as wise as possible; and he exhausts perpetually, over and over again, his little stock of common-places, and of such *extra-ordinaries* as he has chanced to pick up and remember. The folly of the one is “*made known*” to all. The wisdom of the other “*rests in the heart*” of him who possesses it, dis-

covered only by degrees, and by the few with whom he comes into intimate contact.*

Ver. 34. "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people."

The sentiment may be applied to *rulers* and to *people*. Righteousness in the rulers "exalteth a nation;" and the general prevalence of righteousness in the community "exalteth a nation." The true honour of a nation, like that of an individual, lies in *character*;—and even as to what is too often placed by the thoughtless *first*—even as to national *wealth* and temporal prosperity, and the extension of possessions and dependencies, it is *character* that tends most effectually to their attainment; and it is character, in a special manner, that alone secures their permanence. How often, in the history of nations, has character procured wealth and aggrandizement; and then the wealth and aggrandizement, by their seductive and corrupting influence, gradually, but with accelerating progress, destroyed character!—And again, as the final step, how often has the destruction of character proved the decline and fall of the empire even in its temporal and secular greatness, and hastened its complete extinction!

When there is, in any community, the prevalence of true religion, with its inseparable attendants and proportionals, the personal and social virtues, sobriety, justice, mutual integrity and honour, industry, and practical benevolence,—there are in that community the elements of national greatness,—of true, internal, independent happiness, as well as of advancing prosperity and elevation. The tendency of these to promote such results is manifest. They produce peace, union, stability, and concentration of energies; with personal and social, civil and religious liberty. They are, moreover, the means of bringing down the divine blessing on a country,—without which, what is there that can prosper? Without which all will be failure, all blight and barrenness, all disappointment and discomfiture, all declension and penury, and slow or rapid consumption. The prevalence of

* For further illustration see chap. xii. 23; xiii. 16.

impiety, with its accompanying vices, tends, in the very nature of things, to ruin,—to ruin both personal and national: and the tendency is aggravated by its withdrawing the protection and smile of the Almighty,—the “righteous Lord, who loveth righteousness.”

We find the great general principle of divine providence, in regard to nations, thus laid down by Jehovah himself to the prophet Jeremiah—“At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them,” Jer. xviii. 7—10. This was a principle, not applicable to *Israel* exclusively:—for we find it expressly applied to the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the inhabitants of Sodom and of Nineveh. And, the Old Testament bringing before us specimens of the divine administration,—the Spirit of God letting us so far into the secrets of its principles and laws,—we have every reason to believe that in the government of God over the world, the same principle is still in operation, though *we* may not be able to trace it,—that, had we only an inspired record of what takes place now, we should see it clearly in all cases; and, even without such a record, there are cases in which it would be equal impiety and blindness not to discern and own it.

Let us all be assured, then, that we do most efficiently promote the security and prosperity—the true glory and the true happiness of our country, in proportion as we contribute, in any way, to the advancement of the interests of religion amongst its inhabitants. Of the contrary, alas! there is a vast and growing amount in the British Isles; and it is aggravated by the greatness and abundance of our privileges,—of the light of divine knowledge and the varied *means* of piety and virtue. There are systems in operation, of which the tendency is to the deterioration of all

that is good, and the introduction of all that is evil. By every legitimate means we should seek their counteraction. But by *legitimate* means, I am not to be understood as intending the interference of the strong arm of *law*,—the staying even of irreligion and immorality themselves by prohibitory statutes and penal enactments,—unless in cases where injury is done to person or property, or to the peace and safety of individuals, neighbourhoods, or the country at large. I mean, the personal and the combined activity of the friends of the truth, and of true religion, to diffuse right principles, and thus to counterwork the spread and influence of wrong ones. In proportion to the zeal and efforts of the abettors of error, let the adherents of truth bestir themselves. If the agents of the enemy of souls be busy, let the agents of the Redeemer of souls be busy too. Let all *moral* means, especially, be put diligently into operation for circulating the knowledge, impressing the importance, urging the obligation, and promoting the influence of principles in accordance with the word of God; in suppressing intemperance; in checking all descriptions of vicious indulgence; in diffusing education; in promoting, by Sabbath-schools, by Bible and Tract distribution, by visits of mercy to the poor, the knowledge and the leavening influence of religious truth; by town missions and country missions, circulating light and dissipating darkness; and, at the same time, it should be added, by such measures of private philanthropy, and by countenance and aid to such measures of legislative authority, as are fitted to augment the independence and comfort of the inferior classes of society, and thus to repress the spirit of discontent and turbulence, and to encourage that of satisfaction, quietness, and peaceful industry, and to engender a disposition of greater willingness to attend to those means which may be used for their higher and better interests.

And let it be our prayer, that the "*righteousness* which exalteth a nation" may ever be found in the administration of its government;—that its great men may be good men—men "*fearing God and hating covetousness*"—not actuated by selfish but by truly patriotic and disinterested principles:

—of which, though there are honourable exceptions, we have always so much reason to lament that the amount to be found on any side of political partizanship, should be so sadly small!—Let it be our prayer, that “*the throne* may be established in righteousness,”—and that, from the throne downward, righteousness, in principle and practice, may pervade the nation. While we bewail the amount of varied wickedness in our own land, let us not be unmindful of the good, nor unthankful for it. There is much. There is much of true religion. There are many renewed and praying souls; many who are the salt of the earth; many objects of divine love; many who imitate that love in active benevolence, and who benefit the community, both by example, activity, and prayer. By this salt is Britain preserved from universally pervading corruption. By this shield of prayer is Britain protected from divine vengeance. This is Britain’s glory; this Britain’s security.

There is a close connexion between this and the following verse, as nothing has a better tendency to diffuse righteousness in a community, and to maintain and perpetuate it, than the character of the reigning prince:—“The king’s favour is toward a wise servant: but his wrath is against him that causeth shame.”—These words state what *ought to be*. No one ought to be the king’s or the queen’s servant who is *not* wise; and toward every such wise servant the royal favour should be specially extended. And who *is* a *wise* servant? Not a servant who flatters royal vanity; accommodates itself to royal foibles; indulges royal prejudices; chimes in with royal caprices; tolerates and connives at royal vices, whether personal or official. No. A wise servant must be a servant of conscientious principle, and of bland but unflinching fidelity. He is one who gives prudent and faithful counsel; who “speaks truth as he thinks it in his heart;” whose counsels are dictated by a right understanding of the times and knowledge of what such times require,—not by a wish to ingratiate the minister with the prince, and so to promote his own personal advantage, but by the principles of genuine patriotism as well as loyalty. Such a public servant is a

blessing to the throne, and through the throne to the country. Such a servant will, unquestionably, on the supposition of his being under its influence himself, do all that lies legitimately in his power to promote the interests of true religion; and he will avail himself, for this purpose, of the augmented influence which his high station gives him. This is quite a distinct thing from exerting *official authority* in religion. I have spoken of what may be *legitimately* in his power. But the exercise of *such* authority is *not* legitimate. The principles and laws of true religion are in the Bible; and in the Bible alone is their authority; and in the Bible alone are the gracious rewards and the penal sanctions, by which obedience to them is encouraged and the infraction of them restrained. Every interference of human authority in such matters is an interference with the exclusive prerogatives of the Most High. But *influence* may be more than legitimate: it may be incumbent. On every man, in every station, who knows the truths of religion and feels their power, it is incumbent. He will use it in every way that is in harmony with freedom of conscience, and with the independence and spiritual character of the kingdom of Christ.

The expression "causeth *shame*" corresponds perhaps to the word "*reproach*" in the verse preceding. That servant "causeth shame," by whom that is encouraged from which reproach arises; that is who encourages *sin*. Against a minister of this description the king's wrath ought to be directed: he should frown him from his presence.—That servant too "causeth shame," who, from whatever motive, gives counsels to his prince which, he has reason to believe, must prove either prejudicial or abortive;—such as can hardly fail to render him unpopular with his people, and expose him, by their failure, to the derision of foreign states—a derision in which the kingdom as well as the throne—the people as well as the monarch, are involved.—That servant too "causeth shame" who is the enticer and tempter of his royal master to evil, to vicious and licentious indulgences, from which, ultimately, he finds himself involved in personal infamy, and in official disgrace and embarrassment. He then awakes, but

too late, to a sense of his folly in allowing himself to be thus seduced and duped; and then his bitter reflections awaken his wrath against the unprincipled and faithless servant who has brought him to shame.

The example of the Court necessarily spreads downward to the very lowest, through all the intermediate grades of society. We find this strikingly exemplified in the recorded history of the kings of Israel and Judah. According to the character of the prince was, to a great extent, the character of the people. And indeed, we might select many hardly less striking exemplifications of the same thing from the history of our own country. So that, in every view, it is of eminent consequence, that the throne should be based on righteousness; and that those around it should be men of righteous principle—wise, faithful, upright, fearing God. Let Christians, then, comply with the apostolic admonition—"I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth," 1 Tim. ii. 1—4.

If the character of the reigning monarch thus affects and moulds the character of his people, let the subjects of the King of Zion consider the character of *their* Prince. Let them set that character, in all its perfect beauty and glorious excellences, ever before them. The more closely they imitate it, the more complete will be their own personal honour and happiness; and the more complete too will be the honour and happiness of the collective spiritual community. When that community is finally assembled in the heavenly city, all shall be fully conformed in character to their King and Head, and the glory and blessedness of the community shall thus be perfected. O my brethren, let us show that our hope of likeness to Him *then* is no delusion, by a growing earnestness of desire to be like him *now*.

LECTURE XXXVII.

PROV. XV. 1—6.

“A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness. The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit. A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent. In the house of the righteous is much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble.”

IN the words “*a soft answer turneth away wrath*,” anger is supposed to have been already kindled, and to have expressed itself in terms of passionate irritation. In such circumstances, the offended pride of our nature prompts us to return an answer in the same strain,—not “*soft*” but high and harsh. We wish to show, especially if others are present, that we are not afraid, and that we are not the persons to be provoked and abused with impunity!—The answer which natural feeling would thus dictate, would be one in “*grievous words*,” adding to irritation, and further “*stirring up anger*”—one which would be only as fresh fuel to a burning and blazing fire, or as a fresh gust of wind on the already raging deep. In this there would be double wrong: it would be giving indulgence to an evil temper in ourselves, as well as stimulating and increasing it in others.

Our incumbent duty, when so situated, is *self-restraint*. Such restraint, though often regarded as mean-spiritedness, and want of becoming and manly pride (accustomed as we are to give gentle names to ungentle things) is true

greatness of mind—true dignity.* But how much soever our judgments are convinced of this, how entire soever our concurrence in the abstract sentiment, we feel how impotent too often such conviction is in the moment of temptation, when exposed to the angry menaces, or the scornful and defying words, and looks, and gestures of an adversary! And yet *that* is just the moment for the exercise of self-restraint. At other times there is no trial of it and no need for it. It is easy to be calm, and sweet, and gentle, when there is nothing to provoke. Tempers are only known when brought into contact with some antagonistic element: as certain chemical substances when apart remain still, cool, and motionless; but when brought together, discover the heat and fume and noise of violent effervescence.

Christian brethren, let us look to our great pattern: "When he was reviled, he reviled not again, when he suffered, he threatened not." Yet never surely was there such true dignity of character—the sublimity of composure, the majesty of meekness!

The verse before us states a *fact*:—"A soft answer turneth away wrath." In some instances, indeed, a soft answer is the surest way to irritate,—to stir up wrath even to the highest pitch. There are persons of so peculiar a temper, that they will be provoked by our very calmness,—roused to perfect fury, because they cannot get us into a passion like themselves. The failure of their attempts to provoke us increases their own rage, and the very contrast between our self-command and their want of it, adds to the madness. *Generally*, however, the effect will be as here represented. And even in the cases referred to of apparent exception, the exception, after all, relates only to the period of excitement,—the moments of actual irritation. On subsequent reflection, the remembrance of the "soft answer;" of the manner in which their passion was met, of the contrast between their own undue heat and our coolness, will produce the relings of shame, and lead to acknowledgment of error.

* Comp. chap. xiv. 29.

The sentiment is—and it holds to reason as well as accords with fact—that meekness will allay the fury of the flames of passion. By pouring on oil we may calm the wave, which we should lash and rebuke in vain.

I might illustrate the proverb by Scripture instances. Look at the effect of the quiet and dignified reply of Gideon to the exasperated “men of Ephraim” by which “their anger toward him was abated.” Look again at the case of Abigail and David—the calm prudence of the former turning away the wrath which had been excited by the surly and ungrateful churlishness of the besotted Nabal, and which had armed David and his men for vengeance. And as an exemplification of the effects of an opposite style of answer, you may be reminded of the contention between the men of Israel and the men of Judah, at the time of David’s restoration after the death of Absalom, when the *fierce words* of the latter drove off the former under the rebellious standard of Sheba the son of Bichri; and of the case of Rehoboam, who by refusing the counsel to give “*a soft answer*” to the people who came petitioning for a mitigation of their burdens, and adopting one harsh and repulsive, deprived the house of David of the subjection of the ten tribes, which attached themselves to “Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin.”

Verse 2. “The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.”

Similar sentiments have come repeatedly before us;* but though *similar*, not *the same*. “*Knowledge*” is the *possession of information*, and we have here the correct idea of *wisdom*; which, practically considered, is *the right use of knowledge*, and, in regard to *character*, the *ability so to use it*. The wise man makes a right use of knowledge in the mode of communicating it—“the *tongue* of the wise useth knowledge aright”—as regards times, persons, places, company, and the spirit in which it is used: and in proportion to the degree of knowledge, both *wisdom* and *principle*

* See chap. xii. 23; xiii. 16; xiv. 33.

become desirable, to enable and to dispose its possessors to use and to improve it.—“*But the mouth of fools pours out foolishness.*” Their words are uttered without discrimination while the character of the words corresponds with the character of their minds. If we take *wisdom* and *folly* in their higher sense, as meaning religious principle on the one hand, and the want of it on the other,—then “using knowledge aright,” will be using it for the glory of God and the best interests of men; and “the pouring out of foolishness,” the presumptuous utterance of what is worse than light, and frothy, and unprofitable,—even the sentiments and words of irreligion and profanity.

Verse 3. “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.”

I need hardly say that all such language is figurative. “GOD IS A SPIRIT.” The ascription to Him of corporeal organs must be understood in harmony with this declaration. By “the eyes” of Jehovah, we are to understand His *capacity of discernment*. By us, the manner of that discernment is altogether incomprehensible. From this, indeed, arises the necessity for the use of such figures. Were language used directly expressing the functions and operations of *spirit* simply as such, we should be utterly incapable of understanding it. How God, the eternal Mind, is present every moment in every place, in the exercise of all His infinite perfections, is a matter which involves mysteries far beyond our powers of comprehension,—far deeper than the short line of our intellect is sufficient to fathom. The attempt to understand them will ever force from us the devout exclamation—“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it!”

“The eyes of the Lord *are in every place,*” expresses the unceasing inspection, on the part of the divine Being, of all creatures in the universe at the same moment; there being no person or object; nothing whatever that exists—alive or dead—spirit or matter—intelligent or unintelligent—active or inert—that is ever, even for a single instant, from under His gaze.

Without expatiating on the attribute of omniscience generally, I would confine myself to the light in which it is here brought before us,—the light most immediately and practically useful to us—the *divine acquaintance with the ways of men*.

This is indispensable to God's either *governing* or *judging* the world. His *administration* could not go on without it. There would be immediate and inextricable confusion. Equally essential is it to enlightened and impartial *judgment*. God must *know* that He may *judge*. He must know *all* that he may judge *all*; and He cannot know all otherwise than by a constant, universal, unintermitting supervision, and the most perfectly *intimate* acquaintance with the minds and hearts, as well as the words and actions of men.*

The knowledge of God, arising from His universal presence and inspection, extends, we are here reminded, to both “the *evil* and the *good*.” Nor is the difference between the two ever overlooked by Him. It may at times appear as if it were. He does not always mark it in the distribution of temporal blessings, or crosses and trials. But “the *evil*” are not at all the more the objects of His favour that at times they prosper; nor are “the *good*” the less so that at times they suffer. His eyes still look with favour upon the one, and with displeasure upon the other. On the one He smiles, when to their unbelieving minds He may seem to frown; on the other He frowns, when to their self-flattering but deluded fancy He may seem to smile. The days of darkness through which the one are called to pass shall all terminate in the light of that “blessed day that knows no morrow;” while the light of the other's temporary prosperity shall end in “the blackness of darkness for ever.”†

What a solemn thought, then, to “the *evil*,”—to them who are living “without God”—that from HIM nothing can be concealed! When successfully hiding their misdeeds from the view of men, they forget this. How often realized is the description of Job—“The murderer rising with the

* Comp. Jer. xxxii. 19. and Heb. iv. 13. † Psal. xi. 4—7.

light killeth the poor and needy, and in the night is as a thief. The eye also of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me : and disguiseth his face. In the dark they dig through houses, which they had marked for themselves in the daytime : they know not the light. For the morning is to them even as the shadow of death : if one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death !” Ah ! sad and fatal mistake !—“ *No eye shall see me !*” There *is* an eye that seeth him ;—an eye that is of incomparably greater consequence to him, did he but think of it, than the collective eyes of a peopled universe. Yes ; and there is one morning coming, that shall be infinitely more alarming to him than any that ever dawned upon him in the prosecution of his wicked courses here :—a morning when he shall indeed be “ in the terrors of the shadow of death ;”—that eventful morning when the trump of God shall sound the summons to His bar ; “ when all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth ; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life ; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation ;” when “ God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”

The truth stated in this verse is, at the same time, a source of joy unspeakable to the “ *good* ”—to the people of God. Is it not, Christian friends, a delightful thought, that the ever-watchful eye of your heavenly Father is over all your concerns ?—that His gracious and all-wise providence superintends unceasingly everything relating to your present and your future well-being ? In the strong terms used by your divine Lord and Master,—the strongest in the Bible, to express the minute particularity of the divine regard to his people’s interests,—“ The very hairs of your head are all numbered.” God’s eyes, when on His children, are the eyes of faithful love and vigilant care ; not the eyes of keen scrutiny, in order to detect guilt, but the eyes of tender kindness, in order to afford supply in need, guidance in perplexity, and protection in danger. “ The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry.”

Is not this a comfort? You feel sympathy with the crying and tears of a strayed child, and with the joy of that child when it comes again under the parental eye. But no child of God can ever, in reality, be from under *His* eye, whatever the unbelieving doubts and suspicions of that child may tempt him to fear. When a child of God wanders, it is not from God's ceasing to see *him*, but from his, for a time, ceasing to see God. It is our duty to maintain a firm faith in the constant superintendence of our heavenly Father, and to "delight ourselves in God."—Yet while there is reason for rejoicing, there is reason, at the same time, for *solemn awe*. O, the thought, of having God's eye unceasingly upon us—the eye of Him who is the "high and lofty one, that inhabiteth eternity," who is "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and cannot look upon sin,"—who "is light, and in whom is no darkness at all!"

Verse 4. "The wholesome tongue," or literally, as on the margin—*the healing of the tongue*, "is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit."—The verse may be compared with the second. The tongue which "useth knowledge aright" has a morally and spiritually healing influence. It imparts instruction to the ignorant. It speaks peace to the troubled conscience. It soothes the anguish of the afflicted. It subdues the swellings of passion. It allays the self-inflicted tortures of envy. It heals divisions and animosities,—conciliating to each other the discordant and alienated, and converting enemies into friends. These and other blessed fruits of "*the wholesome tongue*"—the "tongue of health"—entitle it to the designation, "*a tree of life*;"—productive as it is of genuine, varied, valuable joys to all within the reach of its influence. And when the tongue makes known God's "*saving health*,"—the salvation revealed by Him in the gospel,—it then gives "*life*" in the highest and most important of all senses; bringing the outcast and undone sinner to "eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God!"

"*But perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.*" Its being, or producing, "a breach in the spirit"—may be vari-

ously understood. It disturbs and irritates the spirit. It destroys tranquillity and peace of mind. It brings guilt upon the conscience, and distress in various ways upon the heart. The continued unkindness and bitterness of the tongue may so wear out the ever pained and pining heart as to sink it at length prematurely to the grave, especially when, from the nearness and tenderness of any relation, there ought to be in the tongue “the law of kindness”—a sanatory, cheering, soothing, healthful influence.

Verse 5. “A fool despiseth his father’s instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.”*

O how signal the *folly*, how flagrant the *imprudence*—apart from all consideration of its wickedness and guilt—of “despising the instruction” and scorning the counsel, whether of a father or a friend, that would lead to the attainment of eternal happiness, for the sake of a good infinitely inferior, and that lasts but for a moment! “Eternity for bubbles”—the light, empty, airy, glittering bubbles that are blown by the breath of this world’s vanity—“proves at last a senseless bargain.”

Verse 6. “In the house of the righteous is much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble.”†

The “*treasure* in the house of the righteous,” as here contrasted with the “*revenues* of the wicked,” may be understood, not of mere wealth, but of whatever is possessed with contentment and cheerfulness,—with gratitude to God—with confidence in His wisdom, faithfulness, and love,—with an assurance of His fatherly regard,—with the peace that passeth all understanding,—with resignation of spirit to the divine will,—with the present enjoyment of spiritual blessings, and the well-founded “hope of glory, and honour, and immortality.” Even the good things of time, how moderate soever in their amount, when enjoyed *thus*, become “treasures” indeed of inestimable preciousness; realizing the saying of the psalmist, “A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.”

* Comp. chap. i. 23; vi. 20, with 23; x. 1; xiii. 1, 18.

† Comp. chap. xiii. 22, 23; xiv. 11.

It is added accordingly—"But in the revenues of the wicked *there is trouble.*" These revenues we may suppose to be *acquired* wickedly, and *enjoyed* wickedly. But whatever the means of their acquisition, and although in the manner of their enjoyment and use there may be no direct injury to men,—yet if possessed and expended without the fear of God, and if the means themselves of banishing that fear, and preventing the choice of a better portion, it may truly be affirmed that in them "*there is trouble.*" How often do they engender fears and jealousies, anxieties and apprehensions, that drive sleep from the eyes, and slumber from the eyelids! How often do they inspire and nurture pride and passion, impatience of spirit, selfishness, and temptation to thoughtless and sinful indulgence,—such indulgence producing even at the time, and especially in the end, remorse of conscience and the fearful looking-for of judgment! How often do they thus, without imparting real happiness while they last, aggravate condemnation at the close! How often, too, do they render their possessor the object of envy, and of malicious detraction and slander, by which he is wronged even beyond what, on the part of fellow-men, he deserves,—how deep soever his guilt before Heaven! When "the revenues of the wicked" have such effects upon their possessor, tempting him to live and die without God—inserting stings in his conscience, and awakening forebodings in his heart—well may the saying of Samuel Johnson to the celebrated Garrick be applied to them—"These are the things that make a death-bed terrible." It is terrible to leave them, for to the wicked worldling it is leaving his all; and it is more terrible still to enter on the dread unknown—on a world for which no provision has been made, and over the entrance hang "shadows, clouds, and darkness." When he dieth he can "carry nothing away;" and he has nothing in hope beyond—no "bright reversion in the skies," to compensate for the loss of all he is obliged to leave! His glory descends not after him. He has "trouble" *with* his revenues; trouble in leaving them; and trouble for ever in the fatal consequences of their seductive influence over him.

LECTURE XXXVIII

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PROV. XV. 7—12.

“The lips of the wise disperse knowledge: but the heart of the foolish doeth not so. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight. The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness. Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way: and he that hateth reproof shall die. Hell and destruction are before the Lord: how much more then the hearts of the children of men? A scorner loveth not one that reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise.”

OF “*knowledge*,” as of wealth, *the true value depends upon its use*. Laid up, under lock and key, in the coffers of the miser, the largest amount of riches, in bags of rusting gold and silver, *serves no good end*. Its owner may please himself with the thought of having it, and of being known to have it. He may take delight in opening his chests and gloating his eyes, from time to time, on his accumulating heaps; but how mean and pitiful such a gratification even to a reasonable, and how much more to a morally responsible being!—Yet, in a similar way a man may plume himself on the extent and variety of his “*knowledge*.” He may feed his vanity in enumerating to himself its subjects and the amount of it on each. And the gratification arising from the possession of it—apart from the thoughts of vanity—may be of a far higher and more rational kind than that of the former; but if its possessor keeps it all hidden in the depths of his own mind,—shut up in the coffers of his memory, uncommunicated, unapplied to any useful purpose,—he bears the character of an *intellectual miser*.

"The lips of the wise *disperse* knowledge." The lesson was finely exemplified by Solomon himself—"Moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth," Eccl. xii. 9, 10. Solomon's wisdom, we know, related to *science*, as well as to what are more properly called "*the things of God*." We need not doubt that he "taught the people knowledge" in various departments; but from the special mention here made of his *proverbs*, we are warranted in considering his teaching as having special reference to the truths most essential for their present and eternal well-being. Thus too it was with all the prophets and apostles. The treasure was put into these "earthen vessels," not to be kept there, as a personal and private deposit, but as one to be imparted—to be extensively diffused among mankind. "Their lips dispersed knowledge." And it is the incumbent duty of all whom God has made "wise unto salvation," with all zeal for God and compassion for fellow-creatures, to communicate the knowledge which may make others thus spiritually, substantially, eternally wise.

The antithesis in the verse—"but *the heart* of the foolish doth not so"—where we should naturally have expected the *lips* or the *mouth*—corresponds with that in the 20th verse of the tenth chapter, and the principle of explanation is the same. The knowledge dispersed by the lips of the wise, comes forth from "the treasures" that are in "the heart." But in the heart of "the foolish" the "knowledge" is not to be found:—and that which is not in the heart, cannot of course be "dispersed by the lips." If his lips disperse any thing, it must be *folly*.

Verses 8, 9. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight. The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness."

Between these two verses there is a very close and important connexion. The latter of the two may be considered

as containing the *reason* of the former. It is said of Jehovah—"Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity," Psal. v. 4, 5. It is not their *persons* God hates; for He swears by himself—"I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." He hates their doings; hates their evil courses. These, as the second of the two verses states, are "*an abomination*" to Him; and so, therefore, are their religious services. Their *persons* are not accepted; and while they themselves are rejected, their offerings cannot be graciously received. This, brethren, is the true order of things. The sinner himself, believing the glad tidings of the gospel, is first "accepted in the Beloved;" and then, his *person* being accepted, and, on Christ's account, in favour with God, his *services* are accepted also on the same ground.

Intimations such as this, it has been said, might indicate to the then existing generation the approach of another economy, more pure and spiritual than the introductory and comparatively carnal one under which they lived. But this idea of the difference between the two dispensations has, at times, been pushed to an untenable and mischievous extreme. Why should such intimations be considered as only indicating a spiritual dispensation *to come*? Why not as indicating, or rather directly and pointedly expressing the necessity of *spiritual worship*—of *heart-religion even then*? I apprehend there never was a period, never a dispensation, when this was *not* required; or when any thing short of this was acceptable. What is the reason assigned by the Saviour himself for the necessity of spiritual worship?—"The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth," John iv. 23, 24. The first of these two verses must not be understood as meaning that before that time the Father did *not* "seek such to worship him." Against any such interpretation we might plead the verse immediately before it

—"Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews." That the Jews, as distinguished by their special revelation, "knew whom they worshipped," *can* mean nothing less than that Jehovah had been revealed to them in the character in which Jesus speaks of him, namely as *a Spirit*—in the essential spirituality of His nature. God was always a Spirit. The same reason, therefore, always existed for the necessity of spiritual worship. He was always the Searcher of hearts; and always required, and could not but require, the devotion of the heart. Bodily service—the religion of posture—the religion of the lips—the religion of mere outward act, irrespective altogether of the character or the state of the heart, never *could* be well-pleasing in His sight. The Psalmist surely understood this, when he said—"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." The service presented by one man and by another may be, in all that meets the view of fellow-creatures, undistinguishable. But if, in the all-perfect knowledge of God, the *characters* of the parties are different, the services will be regarded accordingly—the one accepted, the other refused. It is the *wickedness* of the wicked that renders the "*sacrifice* of the wicked an abomination." The bullock or the lamb might be the same. The rites observed in the offering of it might be the same; and all might be attended to with the same rigidly scrupulous exactness. Yet in the one case, it might be a sweet savour unto the Lord, and in the other "a trouble unto him which he was weary to bear." That such was the case *then* as well as *now*, we are not left to infer from such premises as those given us by our Lord in the passage referred to. It is plainly and explicitly declared.* And the sentiment suggested by the connexion between the two verses before us, is no other than that which is stated with greater expansion in the divine expostulation with Israel in the opening chapter of Isaiah's prophecy,† where in striking language the connexion between *approved character* and *accept-*

* See Deut. x. 12—16,

† Isa. i. 10—18.

able worship is expressed with the utmost plainness, and with divine force. And the same is the sentiment, uttered, if possible, with even greater emphasis, in the language—"He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol."* I am aware that these expressions have been interpreted as meaning, that under the future dispensation all the existing and prescribed offerings would be abolished, and that it would be as much a sin to offer them as it was then a sin to withhold them. But I can see no sound reason for not interpreting the language as relating to *the time then being*. The connexion of the third and fourth verses brings out the same sentiment with that before us, that "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord." Why was the slaying of an ox in sacrifice as unacceptable to Jehovah as the murder of a man?—the offering of a lamb as the slaughter of an unclean dog?—the presenting a prescribed oblation as a libation of swine's blood?—the burning of the sweet incense, compounded according to divine prescription, as the blessing of an idol? The reason follows:—"Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations." Thus the different passages speak the same language. They remind Israel, not merely of a coming time when worship of a more purely spiritual character should be required by Jehovah from His people, but of the then existing obligation to give Him the homage of a devoted heart, and of a life of obedience in harmony with nominal and ceremonial distinction,—and of the aversion of Jehovah, the heart-searching God, to worship of a different description,—to worship "coming out of feigned lips," or unaccredited by a consistent life—that God has always looked, and could not but look to the principle *within*, and never would regard otherwise than with loathing "the sacrifice of the wicked." I state these things strongly, because I am persuaded that

* See Isa. lxvi. 3.

very false conceptions prevail about the difference, in this and in some other respects, between both the worship and the morality of the old and the new dispensations.

Let *us* remember that the sentiment before us is applicable now, in its full force, to all merely external acts and forms of worship. They can never be pleasing to the Lord. How should they? The principle of His dissatisfaction with them we feel in ourselves. If any of us were to receive a present, accompanied with many verbal professions of attachment, and we were afterwards to discover that the person from whom it came had been acting a part utterly at variance with all his professions, indicative of a heart that hated instead of loving us, and that the present with its accompaniments, was sent with no other view than to answer some selfish end of his own,—would not that which had at first gratified us be instantly loathed and cast away? Thus it is with God. No oblations, no acts of worship, no alms, can be acceptable in His sight, when He knows them to come from one whose heart, instead of being “right with Him,” is in a state of alienation and enmity,—in hostility to His authority and grace. They are either offered without principle or consideration at all; or for the purpose of covering sin, or of compensating for past transgressions, or of obtaining indulgence to conscience for the future—as a kind of *bribe* to the supreme Judge. They can be regarded by Him in no other light than as an awful insult to His holiness and justice and truth!

Are ungodly men, then, some may be ready to ask, to *be forbidden to pray?*—Forbidden to pray! Who and where is the man that will be presumptuous enough to lay such an interdict? Forbidden to pray! The very thought is shocking. Who will come with such a prohibition between even the chief of sinners—the veriest wretch on earth—and his God? Prayer, if the duty of one, is the duty of all. Abstinence from prayer is positive sin. At the same time, it ought to be equally plain, that every duty presupposes, in the injunction of it, whatever is necessary to its right and acceptable performance. If the *act* of prayer cannot be

acceptable without the *spirit* of prayer, then, when we affirm it every man's duty to pray, we affirm it every man's duty to *have the spirit of prayer*. If, in order to acceptable prayer on the part of a sinner, it behoves to be presented in the name of a Mediator, and in the exercise of faith in that name,—then, when we call upon a sinner to pray, meaning, as we must, that he should pray acceptably, we call upon him to exercise that faith which is necessary to acceptable prayer. This is clear. In calling a man to the discharge of any duty, we call him, of course, to whatever is included in the *right discharge* of that duty; and among other things, to the motive or principle from which the lawgiver requires it to be done. When an ungodly man prays, it is not the *act of prayer* that constitutes the sin; it is the want of a *praying heart*. The sin is *in him*, not in his prayer. The prayer in itself may be very good; but, as coming from him, it may be worse than worthless.

We might apply the same principle more generally, extending it to all duties whatever. They ought all, without exception, to be done from the principle of *love to God*—the elementary and pervading principle of the whole law. An ungodly man is rightly called upon to the fulfilment of the personal and the relative duties which the divine law inculcates. But it is, at the same time, right and necessary to remind him, that, so long as his heart continues in a state of enmity against God, there is not one of them that can be fulfilled acceptably to Him. The *principle* of all acceptable obedience is wanting. It is in some such sense as this that it is said—“*The ploughing of the wicked is sin.*” And it is one of the most affecting circumstances in their condition, that there is nothing they can do that has the approval and acceptance of God! Are they therefore to be forbidden to perform these duties? No, assuredly. But they are to be faithfully reminded that the right discharge of them involves and requires the exercise of the *right principle*; and to be urged by this, and every other consideration fitted to excite a salutary alarm, to turn unto God. Such is the use we would make of the sentiment before us. Is it not an

affecting thought to you, fellow-sinners, that while you continue impenitent and unbelieving, all your duties together—those even on the strict performance of which you may be most pluming yourselves—your very prayers—are “an abomination” to God? He invites you to come to Him, but not to come *continuing in your evil ways*. That is *not* coming to God; for coming to God is forsaking evil. To come to God, and to cleave to sin, is a contradiction in terms. The sinner who comes to God *comes in prayer*; and the sinner who comes in prayer must come in *faith* and in the renunciation of self and sin, to serve God thenceforward “in newness of life,” with “his body and with his spirit which are God’s.”

Verse 10. “Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way: and he that hateth reproof shall die.”

The word rendered *correction* is, on the margin, translated *instruction*; but the *principle and spirit* of the statement remain the same. Retaining the former translation there are two interpretations given of it.

1. The word “*is*” being supplementary, the rendering may be—“*Severe correction* to him that forsaketh the way;” that is, *shall be* to him that forsaketh the way. This again is capable of two meanings. It may either, on the principle of parallelism, be understood as of similar import with the second clause of the verse, and explained of the punishment of the impenitently wicked: or it may be understood in reference to present suffering or chastisement, as a means of bringing back from error to a right course. Then the second clause will mean, that if any who has appeared walking in the right way, and has, through temptation, gone astray from it, shall, notwithstanding correction, persist in hating reproof and spurning the admonitions of Heaven, he shall die, and his blood shall be upon his own head. God has said—“The just shall live by faith;” but “if he draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.”

2. Understanding the word “*grievous*” in a sense quite familiar to our ear, the verse has been rendered—“Correction is *irksome* to him that forsaketh the way.” The child that

loves instruction, and is really attached to the ways of God, may err, and need correction. But to such a child it will not be irksome or "grievous." It will melt, and shame, and humble, and restore him. But if a child has submitted to instruction and to the ways of virtue by constraint rather than from principle and with a willing mind,—when for a time he has "run well," but has tired of the right course, and wilfully forsaken it, for ways of his own, more congenial with the real likings of his heart,—to that child correction will be irksome; it will fret and provoke, instead of reclaiming him; will render him sullen, stubborn, and passionate, instead of bringing him in tears of penitence and submission to the feet of the parent whose counsel he has for the time been disregarding. It will have such effects, just in proportion as conscience tells him he is in the wrong, while yet his heart continues to hate the right;—his inclinations resisting conscience, and cleaving to sin and the world.

And what has place in the family of a pious earthly parent has place among the professed children of God. In the heart of a true spiritual child, the heavy but kind corrective visitations of his heavenly Father will produce contrition, and all the meltings of penitential sorrow; and they will lay him prostrate before the footstool of the divine throne, with the humble prayer—"Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit," Psal. li. 9—12.

But in him whose "*heart* departeth from the Lord," having never in the fulness of sincerity and truth, been given to Him, the effect will be very different. They will irritate and gall his spirit; drawing out the evil that is in the heart more and more, and occasioning the further and further spurning of the divine yoke,—the yoke of God's authority. The consequence of any one's "hating reproof"—and spurning the correction that is designed and fitted for his restoration, is *death*:—"he *shall die*." He shall suffer his due

punishment, in that "second death" which is "the wages of sin."^{*}

In connexion with such truths as we have been considering from these verses, it is of importance for us ever to remember, that there is no imposing upon God by outward professions and appearances. Such is the lesson of the eleventh verse:—"Hell and destruction are before the Lord; how much more then the hearts of the children of men?"

Sheol, the word here rendered "*hell*," may sometimes, as well as its corresponding term *Hades* in Greek, signify the place of woe. Its general signification, however, is *the unseen world*—the *state of the dead*. The secrets of that invisible state, and especially of the prison-house of despair itself, are all "before the Lord," though hidden from the eye of man.

The original word for "*destruction*" here is *Abaddon*. The designation is given to the wicked one, as the *destroyer*.† "The verse may denote," says Mr. Scott, "that the deepest machinations of the prince of hell, and of all his legions of fallen angels, are open to the Lord's inspection, and must end in their disappointment and deeper torment:—how, then, can man, who is so inferior in sagacity and subtlety, expect to hide his counsels from God, or to prosper in rebellion against him?"

Verse 12. "A scorner loveth not one that reproveth him; neither will he go unto the wise."

The "*scorner*," the despiser of God and divine things, cannot bear *reproof*; winces, with rising resentment, at every thing that touches and wakes his conscience; dislikes his faithful monitor—receiving him with sullen coldness, with disdainful smile, or with abusive contumely,—spurning his salutary advice, and possibly traducing and calumniating his character. He "*will not go to the wise*"—the truly wise who "fear God"—either through proud contempt, or the consciousness of being wrong, and inability to bear having the

* See chap. i. 30, 31; x. 17.

† See Rev. ix. 11.

wrong exposed and condemned.* Alas! that this principle should be in our fallen nature so strong and inveterate!

Careless sinners, your aversion to the word of God, which you secretly feel to be living, powerful, penetrating; your dislike of sermons that are too searching, that come too close to the conscience, that lay open the secrets of the heart, that press upon you the spirituality and damnatory character of the divine law; and your disposition to pick faults, wherever you can find them, in the characters of the godly, because you are sensible that their example condemns you—are all traceable to this principle. O beware of it. It will ruin you. It will be *death* to you in the end. Listen to conscience. Listen to God. He speaks to you here—in the Bible. You may try to throw it aside, and to parry for the time its piercing thrusts. But in your conscience you know and feel that it is *divine*. O comply with its invitations, that you may escape the execution of its fearful threatenings. “BELIEVE AND LIVE.”

* Comp. 2 Chron. xviii. 7: Isa. xxx. 8—11: Amos v. 10: John iii. 13; vii. 7.

LECTURE XXXIX.

PROV. XV. 13—20.

“A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken. The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness. All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast. Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith. A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife. The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain. A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish man despiseth his mother.”

THE countenance is the natural index of the mind. Each passion and emotion has its appropriate expression there. It can never be natural for a man to smile when angry, or to weep and frown when happy. The tear is appropriated to sorrow; the frown to anger; the smile to satisfaction and pleasure. He is the most accomplished hypocrite, who has most successfully learned the art of substituting the one for the other, and so disguising the real state of his feelings: the most unenviable of all accomplishments.

Yet true it is, that “*a cheerful countenance*” is not always (and that in other cases than criminal dissimulation) the indication of a “*merry heart*”—a really happy spirit; for, as we have seen, “Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness.”

“*A merry heart*,” in this verse does not mean the false, boisterous, temporary merriment, so frequently alluded to in

Scripture, arising from worldly company, intemperance, and dissipation. Neither is it mere light-heartedness—mere thoughtless vacant good humour. It is something far higher and better than either. It is the inward peace and joy imparted by the light of true religion in the soul—the happiness expressed by Solomon in similar terms elsewhere, “Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works,” Eccl. ix. 7. Such was the happiness so delightfully exemplified in the primitive church—when they “did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people.” And what imparted this personal and social cheerfulness *then* is sufficient to impart it *now* and to the end. True religion, as we have already said, but cannot say too often, is the only spring of substantial and satisfactory joy. It is *fitted* to give it; it is *designed* to give it. It is light—sun-light, gladdening every heart into which it finds admission.

And this joy, this inward cheerfulness, this “sunshine of the soul,” *ought to appear*. It should be manifest in the religious man’s looks and behaviour. It should smile on his lip, and beam in his eye. It should characterize his whole conversation and course of life. It ought to be so, for the credit of religion. That professor gives not a fair and faithful representation of it, who wraps his profession in the mantle of melancholy.—It should be the aim of every believer of God’s truth to show that the faith of it has made him happy:—not inspiring a mirth that is either frivolous or boisterous; that expresses itself in the song of the intemperate, the sportive gaiety of the vain, or the “laughter of the fool;” but shedding over the soul the light of heaven, a light which “makes the face to shine” and throws the radiance of joy on even the darkest steps of the Christian’s path through life.

By “*sorrow of heart*,” in the latter part of the verse, I would not understand mere *grief* on account of the bereavements, disappointments, and various trials of life,—to which the truly godly as well as others are subject. No doubt the

tendency of these, especially when long continued and accumulated, is to "*break the spirit*,"—to unnerve it, to deprive it of its tone and vigour, and to unfit for active exertion. Still, it is the excellence and recommendation of true religion, that it gives light even in darkness; that the joy which it imparts remains even in sorrow, and cheers the spirit when otherwise it would sink and break. "The sorrow of heart" here spoken of, we may consider as that which arises from an evil conscience, from envy, discontent, and other similar sources. Or, if the distresses of life are to be considered as among the causes of the sorrow that "*breaks the spirit*," we must regard the language as spoken of those who have the sorrow without the sustaining and cheering consolation.—And in this we may be countenanced by the terms of the fifteenth verse, which, for the sake of connexion of subject and sentiment, we take in here:—"All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast." "*The afflicted*" are evidently the afflicted in situation, *without* the cheerful spirit or "*merry heart*" to support them. To such the days are indeed "*evil*." They pass away very drearily. There is no relief; no light in the gloom; nothing to counteract or counterbalance the woe. "But he that is of a merry heart *hath a continual feast*." The spirit of cheerful piety bestows a feast richer and better than royal dainties. These will not procure true happiness. There may be perfect wretchedness at the best-furnished table. The "*rich man clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day*," may be—too often has been—discontented, envious, anxious, gloomy, melancholy; his feasts not enjoyed; his wines, and his delicate and costly viands not relished. Even in poverty, with all its attendant ills, a spirit such as that we have before described will be "*a continual feast*." A crust of bread and a mouthful of water, with a contented and cheerful heart—especially a heart sustained and gladdened by the "*joys of God's salvation*,"—a heart in which the fountains of peace and delight have been opened by the Spirit of God—will be partaken with incomparably more enjoyment than all the luxuries that wealth can procure.

—"All the days of the afflicted are evil;" for affliction is not in itself "joyous but grievous." But the feast of him who is of "a merry heart,"—who has within himself the sources of true joy, is not terminated, is not even suspended in the season of affliction. *His* feast is independent of changing condition. He often relishes it most, when other sweets are embittered. Often is his inward spiritual festivity the richest, when the supply of his outward and earthly comforts is scantiest. Yes; and to those who enjoy this "continual feast" on earth, it is but the prelude and the foretaste of the everlasting feast of heaven.

We may fairly consider the next verse as indicating the *nature* of the feast—the mental, the spiritual feast—of which the verses we have been expounding affirm the excellence: "The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge; but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness." It is the feast of "*knowledge*"—above all, of *divine* knowledge. He who has "*understanding*"—who is enlightened of God, and discerns the excellence and glory of divine truth—"seeketh" such knowledge. From experience of the enjoyment already imparted by it, he seeks more, and still more—the appetite growing by gratification, delighted with every new discovery, yet never tiring of the old.*—And that in "*seeking* knowledge" the idea of "*feasting*" on it is included, is evident from the terms of the antithesis:—"but the mouth of fools *feedeth on* foolishness." *That* is what they like; that is, therefore, what they seek, and from which they have their own poor and pitiful enjoyment. What feasts the very soul of the wise and good, to him is tasteless and even nauseous.—In regard to *religion itself*, they "feed on foolishness." They are taken with everything, how absurd soever it may be, that serves the present purpose of keeping all quiet within; that lets conscience alone; that dispenses with serious thought, and, preventing inward disturbance, allows them to go on easily and comfortably in "the sight of their eyes and the imagination of their hearts."

* 1 Peter ii. 1—3.

They have a relish for all doctrines of this easy un-annoying description,—that “prick not their hearts”—that embitter not present sweets by any forebodings of the future—that “prophecy smooth things, and cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before them”—the *scarer* of their thoughtless mirth and sinful gratification. They have an appetite for everything of that kind, and cry up to the skies the preachers who dispense it. But it is indeed “feeding on foolishness;” and the folly shall be manifest at last, when that on which they have fed “shall be turned to the gall of asps within them.”

The idea of a *feast* is evidently in Solomon’s mind through the whole passage:—and that, in the fifteenth verse, he designs a contrast between the godly and contented poor man enduring the afflictions of a state of privation and want, and the ungodly and discontented rich man, in the enjoyment of all the world’s fulness, is the more probable from what follows:—“Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith.” Here we have the source and character of the *mirth* intended. It is, as we have been assuming, the happy serenity and cheerfulness springing from true religion—from “the fear of the Lord.” And this too is the “*understanding*” meant in the fourteenth verse, as this fear is “the beginning of wisdom.”

“*Trouble*,” in the latter part of the sixteenth verse, may be understood in various senses, either of which yields a meaning to the verse in harmony with truth.—It may signify *bodily affliction*: in which case, the explanation of the verse will be, that poverty with health and cheerfulness is better than wealth with such corporeal trouble as incapacitates for its enjoyment.—It may signify *trouble of mind and conscience*: and then the sentiment will be, that poverty with peace of mind is far preferable to riches with the disquietude of conscious guilt and self-dissatisfaction;—poverty with a good conscience better than wealth with an accusing and evil conscience;—poverty with a conscience pacified by the blood of sprinkling, better than abundance with a conscience to which that peace-speaking blood has never been applied.—Or it may

signify, the trouble of *domestic discord* and *broils*: and then the lesson will be that poverty with domestic union and peace, springing from and hallowed by the influence of true religion, is incomparably superior to riches the most profuse connected with the absence of such love and harmony,—with alienation, hostility, and strife. What a wretched compensation are “thousands of gold and silver” for the want of affection and peace—the absence of what the poet calls “that only happiness which has survived the fall”—domestic happiness!

This last view of the sixteenth verse is specified in that which follows:—“Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.” Some, indeed, would explain this verse in reference to the entertainer and his company—the “master of the feast and his guests,”—and to the company and guests among themselves;—making the meaning (and it is a true one) to be, that slender cheer, with a cordial welcome, is sweeter far than the costliest profusion with a manifest grudge, or with sentiments of mutual distrust and strife among those who partake of it. But the sentiment is applicable, with a special force of emphasis, to *domestic life*. In proportion to the delightful sweetness of the concord in which the fond affections of nature and grace bind the members of a family in one happy social circle—all being of one heart and one soul—dividing the cares, and more than doubling the enjoyments of life by mutual participation and sympathy,—all bosoms throbbing with a common pulsation,—all lips wearing a common smile,—and all eyes filled from a common fountain of tears—in proportion to the delightful sweetness of such a scene, is the wretchedness of its reverse:—and there is no one who has experienced either the sweetness or the wretchedness—especially the former—that will not subscribe to the sentiment so simply yet in effect so strongly expressed in the verse before us.

There is much in the Bible that bears most kindly on the condition of *the poor*. Throughout it, the Lord is ever expressing towards them His special sympathy and care. Is

not this the case *here*? Are not the sentiments of these verses deserving of their special attention and interest? If you have not the wealth of this world, but are doomed to toil and to comparative penury—think of what is here so truthfully affirmed. If you have in you the fear of the Lord; if you have a sense of His love, and the assurance that that love orders every particular in your lot; if you have the contented and happy spirit which the conviction of this is fitted to inspire; and if to you the domestic scene is one of affectionate and delightful harmony, all hallowed and blessed by the same holy and heavenly principle of “pure religion and undefiled”—O why should you be “envious at the foolish, when you see the prosperity of the wicked?” If the abundance of the man of this world is associated with trouble, or with discord, or with hatred—and above all with *His* displeasure who “hateth all the workers of iniquity”—would you exchange conditions with such? No, my “brethren of low degree, you would not.” Never was there a spirit that enjoyed such perfect peace as His who said—“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.” And HE says to every one of his followers—“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” That peace may be found in the bosom and at the board of the poorest among you; and, possessing it, you will let the man of earth enjoy his “stalled ox,” and sit down in contented cheerfulness to your “dinner of herbs”—your scanty but divinely provided and blessed feast of love. And well were it if the minds of the young were early and deeply imbued with the spirit and sentiment of these verses;—if they had early instilled into them just conceptions of the nature and sources of true happiness, lest they fall into the fatal but sadly prevalent delusion that wealth insures it; and thus make wealth their leading star—their first and unceasing aim!—My young friends, these verses contain truth—divine truth—truth authenticated by the recorded experience of ages—truth that cannot fail, so obvious is it, to come home fully to the convictions of your judgments. It is the same

truth as that so forcibly stated and illustrated by “the faithful witness”—the Lord Jesus himself.* And with what self-evidencing simplicity is the sentiment expressed by the apostle, when he says, “Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content,” 1 Tim. vi. 6—8. They who have “godliness with contentment,” “have all and abound.” They have a treasure in the heart—a treasure in the house—and a treasure in heaven;—a treasure for time, and a treasure for eternity!

Verse 18. “A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth wrath.”—Some would connect this verse with the preceding; and, according to this supposed connection, the meaning is, that a passionate man is a disturber of the peace and enjoyment of the quietest and happiest company. It may, however, be understood *more generally*, as depicting the hasty, hot, resentful spirit, which startles touchily at every word or look; finds meanings in them that have no existence but in a perverted fancy; catches fire in a moment; breathes vengeance; and by high words stirs up the spirits of others, and kindles the flames of discord. In contrast with which is the spirit that is “slow to anger” and appeaseth wrath—the meek and quiet spirit which “is in the sight of God of great price.”

Verse 19. “The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns; but the way of the righteous is made plain.”

The meaning is sufficiently obvious. “*The slothful*” fancies, as apologies for lazy inaction, innumerable obstacles and difficulties—anything as a reason for sitting still. And not merely does he anticipate obstacles to *beginning*, he is ever discovering them as reasons for *desisting*; finding out that further exertion is vain,—that there is *no getting on*,—that all is “*a hedge of thorns*,” at once annoying and impracticable,—that the expectation of ever accomplishing his end is quite utopian,—that he must give up at any rate

* Luke xii. 13—20.

some time or other, and therefore *better now*, seeing if the thing cannot be satisfactorily carried out, it is wise not to expend more useless toil. And he will argue this with no little plausibility; for "the sluggard is *wiser* in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason."

On the contrary, "*the way of the righteous*"—of him whose heart, under the influence of right principles, is set on the right discharge of duty—"is made plain." It is *cast up*; it is *paved*. God whom he serves, makes obstacles diminish and disappear before him. Those he feared might prove insuperable, lessen and vanish as he nears them. He is surprised to find how they give way. When obstacles are previously seen, he sets his heart to them; looks at them in all their discouraging magnitude, and looks at the same time to God—to Him "who giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might increaseth strength;" and in this strength—"the strength of the Lord God," he goes on and perseveres unto the end. Difficulties are thus surmounted. The way becomes increasingly "plain." The "hedge of thorns" is cleared away. "Darkness is made light before him, and crooked things straight."

In the whole of your spiritual warfare, brethren, put your trust in God—in the divine "Captain of your salvation." He leads you to victory. Shrink not to follow Him. *He* will never leave *you*; let no unworthy and dastardly fears tempt *you* to leave *Him*. Let no indolence embrace your loins. Let no difficulties or dangers in the way daunt you. Press after His banner. Through *HIM* you shall do valiantly. Let your encouragement be—"In Jehovah have I righteousness and strength." With His righteousness to justify you, and his strength to protect and save you, you shall be more than conquerors!

Sinners, beware of indolent supineness in "the things that belong unto your peace,"—in the concerns of your soul's salvation. I call not upon you to be "up and doing," that you may work out that salvation for yourselves. *That* is a work of which the honour belongs to another. The Son of God is the only Saviour. You are not to save your-

selves, but to come to Christ for salvation. Defer not this under any false impression of difficulties and intercepting obstacles in your path, frightening you from the attempt. There is no such thing. It is all illusion. If there are obstacles in the path, they must be put there by yourselves; for there are none—no not one—of God's interposing. He has cleared all away. There is no "hedge of thorns" between you and Christ. On the ground of his finished work—the work that justifies the ungodly—he stands ready to receive you; and God stands ready to receive you for his sake. Believe what this divine Book testifies of him as divinely true; and, in the spirit of felt necessity, of simplicity, of confidence, of self-renouncing humility, of grateful joy, cast yourselves, without fear or misgiving, on the riches of his grace:—"for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him."

LECTURE XL.

PROV. XV. 21—33.

"Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom: but a man of understanding walketh uprightly. Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established. A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth; and a word spoken in due season, how good is it! The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath. The Lord will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow. The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord: but the words of the pure are pleasant words. He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live. The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things. The Lord is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous. The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart; and a good report maketh the bones fat. The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise. He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding. The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility."

"Joy" in "*folly*!"—in the frivolous and wicked pursuits of a frivolous and wicked world! O the miserable pleasure!—the sorrow-breeding joy! Who seeks such joy is emphatically "*destitute of wisdom*." The truly wise—"the man of understanding, *walketh uprightly*;" adheres closely and steadily to the dictates of divine authority, with a single eye,—a "heart right with God." *He* has no delight in folly; no joy in seeing, or hearing, or doing, or uttering it. He "abhors that which is evil, and cleaves to that which is good." When witnessing folly in others, he feels with the Psalmist—"Rivers of waters run down mine eyes because they keep not thy law."

Verse 22. "Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established."* This verse has been rendered, according to its true spirit—"Designs not well weighed shall miscarry; but when many have well deliberated, they shall succeed."

In these words there is still a connexion with *folly*. Hasty schemes—projects of crude and rash formation, and precipitate execution—bid fair to prove abortive. Such projects and schemes characterise the fool. They are the product of his self-sufficient conceit, and contempt of counsel. The miscarriage of them, anticipated by all but himself, covers him with confusion, and involves himself and others in difficulty and distress. Self-diffidence is always becoming. Even when we *must* rely on our own judgment, from a calm conviction of our better acquaintance with the principles, and facts, and likelihoods of any case—still it ought to be with humility.

The word translated "*counsel*," is by some rendered *secrecy*. And, on very many occasions, few things are of more consequence to success;—secrecy of consultation as to the best means of accomplishing important purposes, and secrecy among those concerned in their actual prosecution. For want of this, how many designs of the utmost moment have been doomed to frustration! But when there is faithful fellowship in consultation and execution, and no one left *unconsulted* whose knowledge might be turned to good account, and whose advice might preclude one or other of the possibilities of disappointment—this is what, by the blessing of God, is most likely to ensure success. I say *by the blessing of God*. O let it never be forgotten, that *without that* all is fruitless—even the union of the soundest judgments, and the best concerted and best adjusted plans. The two words of the late lamented and martyred Williams must never be separated, TRY and TRUST.

Verse 23. "A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth; and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!"

Some would connect this verse with the preceding. He who, among "a multitude of counsellors," suggests a happy thought—a wise, prudent, sure, and safe expedient that had not occurred to the rest—that man "hath joy by the answer of his mouth:" he has the joy of gaining the approbation and thanks of others, and of seeing happy results from his advice being followed.

More generally :—when a wise, prudent, and pious man is enabled to give a salutary advice, in a matter of moment, at a seasonable time, in a manner at once convincing and persuasive, intelligent and winning, so as to conduce to the desired effect,—in preventing the adoption or arresting the prosecution of mischievous measures,—in keeping back or reclaiming from error and sin,—in supporting the distressed,—in supplying the destitute,—in confirming the irresolute,—in turning and strengthening the tempted,—in directing the rash and improvident,—in promoting, in whatever way, the benefit of others—immense good may be effected;—and this, having sprung from *his* suggestion, will give joy to his heart.*

We are reminded afresh, that "the word spoken" must be not only "good," but "*in due season*"—when circumstances are such as, instead of hindering the desired effect, will second and help on the advice. To be really "*good*," indeed, an advice must be good in the time and the manner, as well as in the matter of it. Persons who overlook this, wonder that they should fail;—they can't understand it. Yet they might. If they would only look within and reflect whether, were the same counsel given to *them* at such a time, in such a manner, and in such circumstances, it would not equally fail.

The remark as to "*due season*," holds with special force in regard to admonitions to the men of the world bearing on *religion*—of all subjects the most unpalatable, and respecting which they are most jealous and sensitive. How

* We have an apt illustration in the case of *David and Abigail*—1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33.

often do well-meaning but injudicious Christians do mischief, by obtruding their sentiments and their counsels, without in the least considering *when* or *how*!

Yet, let us again be warned against covering ourselves from the reprehensions of conscience under the convenient shield of *necessary prudence*, and thus lose, as alas! we too often do, many an opportunity of which, without the violation of any rule of propriety or delicacy, we might avail ourselves for the good of others. Let us be jealous of ourselves on the side on which we are most in hazard of erring—the side, generally, of undue reserve and dastardly timidity.

The word in the following verse translated “*above*” may, without any material alteration of its meaning, be rendered *upwards*: “The way of life is upwards for the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath.”

There is a way of *life*, and a way of *death*, an upward and a downward way. “The *way of life*” it is the great purpose of the Bible to reveal. That way has been the same from the hour when “sin entered into the world.” Then God made it known. Whatever was required, in vindication of the divine character in human forgiveness and salvation, must have been required *from the first*. Whatever was required at “the fulness of time” must have been equally required at the expulsion from paradise. The character of God was at both periods the same. The principles of His government, and the demands of His law were the same. The way of life for sinners, therefore, must have been the same. Though the atonement was not immediately *made* it was immediately *needed*, and it was immediately *announced and promised*. It was quite competent for that God who “knoweth the end from the beginning,” to proceed immediately upon the credit of what was afterwards to be done. The words of Jesus—“*I am the way*,” were true not only when he uttered them, but for all past and all future ages. That way, announced in the first promise, and “witnessed by the law and the prophets,” was, at the “fulness of time,” clearly made known as a way open for sinners, and to remain open to the end. “Righteous Abel” went to heaven by this

way, as aged Simeon did, as Stephen did, as every dying believer has since done, and as the last sinner saved from the earth must do. This "way of life"—the way of faith and holiness—is *upwards*. It leads to heaven—to the celestial world, with all its "fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore."

It is "*for the wise*." The foolish are not found there. They despise the way, and refuse to walk in, or to enter it. They shut their ear. They turn away their foot. They choose counsels of their own. But all who are "wise,"—all who do not, in the spirit of infatuation, "forsake their own mercies," are found in this way. And they *are* wise; for it is set before them, "that they may *depart from hell beneath*." Fools take the downward road. It is easily found, and easily kept. It is full of company. It is full of allurements—bewitching, fascinating allurements, whose true nature is concealed under all that is tempting in appearance and promise. It is in accordance, alas! with the inclinations and tendencies of corrupt nature. The "*upward*" road is to that nature unattractive. It presents obstacles, privations, and hardships. It seems, as in the Pilgrim's Progress it is designated—"the hill of difficulty." But the truly wise will disregard the hindrances by which the way is ever, on the part of Satan, most artfully beset. He will press into it; he will deny himself; he will "go in the strength of the Lord God." He knows it to be the way of *life*;—that were there nothing else in it to the end than hardships, toils, and trials, still it leads "*upwards*"—away from the pit beneath to the paradise above,—from hell to heaven. And he finds, by sweet experience, that in this way there are present compensations, far more than sufficient to counterbalance all with which he is required to part; blessings, and joys, and hopes, incomparably better than aught the downward way offers to its deluded frequenters. It is "the way of *life*" even now—the way of present pleasantness, the path of present peace!

Verse 25. "The Lord will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow."

From the style of the antithesis, between the *proud* and

the *widow*, we are naturally led to conceive a special allusion to the haughty oppressor of the desolate and unprotected—to the overbearing worldling who insolently abuses his power, in lording it over his poor dependents. Jehovah gives ample warning to all of the interest *He* takes in the cause of “the widow and the fatherless,” and of his deep displeasure against all their oppressors.* We may well tremble to think of promoting our own advantage, in any way, or in any degree, at their expense. Woe to the man who does so! God will see to it. What is so acquired cannot be enjoyed with either a quiet conscience or the smile of heaven. It is an accursed thing. It is the wedge of gold and the Babylonish garment, by which the blessing of righteousness and mercy is turned away.

“The *proud*,” just alluded to, are but one description of the more general character in the next verse—“The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord: but the words of the pure are pleasant words.” Or thus, “Hateful to the Lord are the thoughts of the wicked; but pleasant are the words of the pure”—pleasant, that is, *to the Lord*. It is said, “The Lord is a God of *knowledge*; by him *actions* are weighed.” But His knowledge goes further than to actions. “The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.” Not one thought, sinner, passes through your mind, though fleetly as the “arrows of light,” that escapes His notice. Your most secret imaginings; your most momentary wishes and purposes; ideas never uttered; designs never executed—all are naked to His view.”—That circumstances have prevented the execution of any purpose, does not in the least interfere with or mitigate the criminality of the *intention*. Of *the good* that David intended to do, God said, “It was well that it was in thy heart:” and so *the evil* that is in the heart of the sinner brings upon him guilt, rebuke, and condemnation. “The law is *spiritual*:”—“Whoso looketh on a woman to

* See Deut. x. 17, 18. *et loc. al.* Psal. lxxviii. 5, 6; cxlvi. 9: Jam. i. 27.

lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart;" and that unchaste thought is "an abomination to the Lord."—"He that hateth his brother in his heart is a murderer;" and that thought of malice and envy, the embryo of murder, is "an abomination to the Lord." The heart may thus be steeped in impurity, and indictable for a brother's blood, while no overt act has discovered its hidden secrets to men.

"*But pleasant are the words of the pure.*" The *pure* stand in contrast with the *wicked*. They have been the acceptable worshippers of Jehovah in every age.* In them the promise of the New Covenant has been fulfilled—Jehovah having "written his laws in their hearts,"—having "taken away the stony heart out of their flesh, and given them a heart of flesh,"—having "given them a new heart and put within them a right spirit." They have "purified their souls in obeying the truth." They have been "washed and sanctified." The "words" of such, evidently supposed to be in harmony with their character—*pure* words, are "*pleasant*" to the Lord. The child of God may have little else in his power than holy discourse. Other means of usefulness may not, in providence, have been conferred on him. He may have little wealth, little authority, little influence. The very attempts which, by the only means in his power, he makes at doing good, may fail. But even the attempt is "*pleasant*," being made with an eye to the divine glory, and a benevolent wish to advance the happiness of fellow-creatures. What he speaks for God, however humble the manner of it, and however lowly the company amongst whom it is uttered, God approves and records. "A book of remembrance is written before him for them that fear him and think on his name." Their words may not be uttered in the society and in the ears of the great; but if they are pure words, proceeding from a pure heart, they are more acceptable to God than the words of the mighty and the noble coming from hearts not "right with Him." As "the filthy conversation of the

* See Psal. xxiv. 4; lxxiii. 1: Matth. v. 8.

wicked" is not the less offensive and hateful to God, because it comes from the lips of high-born nobility, so the conversation of his sanctified children sounds not less pleasing to his ears for the meanness of their birth or the poverty of their condition. See to it, rich and poor alike, that all your words are words of purity. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt." "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."

Verse 27. "He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live."

A man may be "*greedy of gain*" for two opposite purposes—to *hoard* or to *spend*. He who hoards "*troubleth his own house*." He pinches both himself and them. He allows them to starve in the midst of plenty. He frets at every outlay. He grudges every comfort. Even necessary food and clothing are furnished in the scantiest measure, and of the meanest kind. He is hardly reconciled to the constitution of nature, which makes these requisite. He would fain make out living without them; but since this cannot be, his next best is to find out the *minimum*—the least on which nature can subsist. A poor, famished, troubled household truly, is the household of him whose great aim is to gripe and to keep!

Then, many a time, the man who, in his "greed of gain," "*hastes to be rich*," is one who "troubles his own house." He plunges into rash and hazardous speculations—incessantly varying and precipitately executed schemes—anything that holds out a promise, although ever so precarious, of a quick and large return. It is *luck or ruin*. Hence perpetual apprehension, inordinate anxiety, carking care—care often too well founded, and ending in sudden loss, and wreck of fortune.

The "greed of gain" may lead a man to worse still—to the use of questionable, and even of flagrantly dishonest and iniquitous methods of acquiring it: which, when detected, (and how rarely do they escape detection!) bring on him utter disgrace,—disgrace too often unjustly and cruelly attaching

to his family ; while they must endure the distress—to many sensitive minds amounting to agony—of witnessing *his* exposure and dishonour. Often, alas ! has the man of avarice been the “troubler of his house” by plans and courses of unrighteousness, meanness, falsehood, cruelty, oppression, and even murder !

The last clause of the verse implies that in the first there is a special, though not an exclusive, reference to the *taking of gifts* or bribes ; for the antithesis is between him that is “*greedy of gain*” and him that “*hateth gifts*.”—The receiving of bribes by men in situations of responsible influence, is one of the evils that is often produced by greed of gain. But “he that hateth gifts *shall live* :” that is, shall enjoy life—shall live in comfort, in domestic harmony, in social happiness, in the secure possession of a good conscience, a good name, and the blessing of God.

Verse 28. “The heart of the righteous studieth to answer : but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.”

What is before said* of the *wise and the foolish* is said here of the *righteous and the wicked* : and what is before said of the utterance of *wisdom and folly*, is here said of the utterance of *good and evil*. We have repeatedly seen how Solomon identifies these in his statements. Wickedness is folly ; goodness is wisdom. There is, in this verse, a very important feature in the working of right principle. “*The heart*,”—that is, the mind or inward part generally, not the affections merely, as we are wont to use the word heart, but the judgment also—“the heart of the righteous *studieth to answer*.” He considers what he should *say*, as well as what he should do ; knowing what an amount of evil or of good often depends on words. The fear of God, and the love of his neighbour combine to dictate this.

What is, in the latter part of the verse, affirmed of “*the wicked*”—they “pour out evil things,” implies recklessness alike as to the *evil* of what they say *in itself*, and the effects, often serious, which it may produce ; as if they gloried in

* Verse 2. and chap. xii. 23.

the freedom of their tongue to utter what they please; saying, "Our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?" They even get into *the habit* of thus "pouring out evil things,"—as in the case of the profane swearer,—and then derive their plea in extenuation, from the very consideration that proves the evil to have attained its greatest height—that they have got so much accustomed to it that they *can't help it!* And, while they are wounding the sensibilities of all who hear them, they wonder what they can have said that should be so offensive!

Verse 29. "The Lord is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous."

In an important sense the Lord is *near*—alike near, *to all*,* and none can ever "go from his presence or flee from his Spirit." But such phraseology as that in the former part of this verse is often used to express, not actual, or physical, nearness or distance, but *states of mind*. And the words, on this principle, may mean, either the state of mind of the wicked towards God, or the state of God's mind towards the wicked.

Here the words relate to the latter, as is clearly indicated by the antithesis in the second clause of the verse. The meaning is, that the Lord has *no complacency in the wicked*. There is an infinitude of distance between His purity and their evil principles and courses. These He holds in abhorrence; and they who follow them are not, and cannot be the objects of his love and care;—of those whom He guides by his counsel, shields by his power, cheers by his smile, and "receives to glory." He "knoweth them afar off;" keeps aloof from them; sets his face against them; admits them not into his presence; and at last banishes them from him for ever!

But "*He heareth the prayer of the righteous.*"† What a delightful assurance is this! What a blessing to know that Jehovah is near; with an open ear, a loving heart, and a

* Psal. cxxxix. 3—5: Prov. xv. 3: Acts xvii. 27.

† Comp. Psal. xxxiv. 15, 16; lxvi. 18, 19; cxlv. 17—20.

strong hand!* The LORD is his people's friend in need. He listens to all their requests; places all He has to their account, for the supply of their every want; and maintains an endearing intimacy with them.† His people never need "go forward but he is not there; or backward but they cannot perceive him." Never need they suppose him "hiding himself that they cannot see him." The supposition is "*their infirmity*." It is baseless. He withdraws not from *them*; but they from *him*. He is "ever near to them that call upon him,—to them that call upon him in truth." "In six troubles he is with them; in seven he does not forsake them." "His ear is never heavy that it cannot hear, nor his arm shortened that it cannot save." "He is nigh to them that be of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."

Verse 30. "The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart; and a good report maketh the bones fat."

Light is, as formerly noticed, the natural emblem of *joy*. What joy, when light springs up in the midst of darkness, bringing into view all the glories and beauties of nature!—What new, strange, thrilling ecstasy of emotion, when light is let in upon the eyes of the blind! As light is thus joyous, so is a "*good report*" or good reputation to the heart of him who enjoys it. It "*maketh the bones fat*."‡ The *bones* may be called the foundation of the corporeal structure, on which its strength and stability depend. The cavities and cellular parts of the bones are filled with the marrow; of which the fine oil, by one of the beautiful processes of the animal physiology, pervades their substance, and, incorporating with the earthy and siliceous material, gives them their cohesive tenacity; a provision without which they would be brittle and easily fractured. "Making the bones fat" means supplying them with plenty of marrow, and thus strengthening the entire system. Hence "*marrow to the bones*," is a Bible figure for anything eminently gratifying

* 1 John v. 14, 15.

† See Luke xi. 9—13; John xiv. 21—23.

‡ Comp. Isa. lviii. 11.

and beneficial. The idea is strongly brought out in the words—"And when ye see this, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like an herb: and the hand of the Lord shall be known toward his servants, and his indignation toward his enemies," Isa. lxvi. 14. The bones "*flourishing* like the green herb"—like an herb copiously supplied with moisture—evidently means the firm, healthy, lively action of the whole system. The import, then, of the expression, "a good report maketh the bones fat," is, that a good reputation contributes eminently to enjoyment, to comfort, health, active vigour, spirit, life, and happiness.

By some, however, "*a good report*" is understood of *good tidings*; and they conceive "the light of the eyes," to refer to the happy, glancing looks of the messenger of such tidings. The eyes of a friend glisten with gladness when he comes as the bearer of pleasant news. And, as "the light of his eyes rejoices the heart," so the "good report" itself which he brings, makes "fat the bones." It cheers and animates the spirit, and thus contributes to the liveliness and vigour of the body itself.

Verse 31. "The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise." The "*reproof of life*" evidently signifies the admonition of which the tendency and the intention are life—the life of him to whom it is addressed—his present and future happiness. And this verse may mean that the *disposition* to listen to the "reproof of life" *is to be found* among the wise. That is its appropriate place. It belongs to the wise,—is a feature of their character. The contrary—the rejection and disregard of that reproof is distinctive of the fool.*

The words may also intimate that he who has once received aright, in sincerity and truth, "the reproof of life," will thenceforward *abide* among the wise. He will fix his lot with them. He will permanently abandon the company of the foolish and the wicked. He will not return whence he came, but from his experience of the happiness found through

* For further illustration of the general sentiment, see chap. i. 5, 6 ix. 7—9,

the heavenly life introduced into his soul will cleave to the Lord and to his people.

That "the reproof of life" is here to be understood in the highest sense, is clear from what follows—"He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding."

"*Despising the soul*"—is acting as if it were a matter of no concern that the soul should be saved; or as if there were no reality in its alleged danger. O that none of you may come to discover the danger, or be brought to the conviction of the preciousness of the soul's life, only when it is too late to escape the one, or to obtain the other! God grant that you may "hear reproof" in time, attending to and obeying His faithful admonitions as to your sinfulness and guilt, and the only way of deliverance and peace—and thus "get understanding," securing the knowledge which alone is "life eternal."

The same general lesson is followed out in the closing words of the chapter—"The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility."

Here is again the grand lesson of practical wisdom taught throughout the inspired volume—"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." *The fear of the Lord* is the sum of Wisdom's lessons. There is not a lesson superior to this in importance to man, among all the infinite stores of divine knowledge. There *cannot be*. Among all the objects of that knowledge HE HIMSELF is infinitely the first and highest.

The former part of the verse sustains an important connexion with the latter:—"And *before honour is humility*." The humility is here connected with "the fear of the Lord," which, when genuine, is utterly incompatible with pride. The two sentiments cannot exist in the same bosom. They are mutually destructive of each other. There is nothing in any human bosom which God can regard as true humility, till the sinner comes down to his true condition—that is, till, in the spirit of entire self-renunciation, giving up, as dishonour-

ing to God, all his previous confidences, he comes before the footstool of the divine throne as a suppliant for unconditional mercy. That sinner assuredly does the very reverse of *honouring* God, who stands out against the overtures of his mercy through a Mediator. Nothing can be more *dishonouring*.—It is dishonouring to the wisdom of God, by imputing to him the adoption of a needless device. It is dishonouring to the law of God, as denying the justice of its sentence. It is dishonouring to God's righteousness, as setting aside the necessity of its claims being fully recognized and maintained. It is dishonouring to God's mercy, as restricts its freeness, and declines being a debtor to it but on certain conditions of its own. It is dishonouring to God, as being dishonouring to his Son, by presuming to divide the glory of salvation with Him, or even to take the credit to itself alone. Humility is the way to "honour." The path to the glory of the celestial city must be through the valley of humiliation. The very first sentence the Saviour uttered, when describing the character of the subjects of his reign, was—"Blessed are *the poor in spirit*: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Thus have we again had before us, under different aspects, the contrast between the wise and the foolish, the righteous and the wicked.—Alas! how many there are, who are prudent for time, but who take no thought themselves, and no counsel from others, for eternity! O let such be again reminded, that what is their joy now, will, in the end, be sorrow and bitterness. *Death* will *silence* your boastings, and *judgment* will *expose* and *condemn* them. Even now (you know in your inmost souls that I speak the truth) your pleasure in sin is subject to many misgivings of heart—you, especially, who have had the instructions and example of the godly. It has secret stings you do not own. The feast, and the dance, and the theatre, and all the higher or lower revelry of life, leaving an aching void which nothing on earth can fill,—you will sigh in vain after substantial happiness, just as Solomon did in what he emphatically calls "the days of his vanity"—until, like him, you return to

God. Nothing whatsoever to which you can have recourse for happiness *without God*, can ever yield it. That is the law of His rational creation; and vain will be all your attempts so set it aside. He has fixed it. It is His absolute and irreversible decree—that no intelligent creature shall enjoy true happiness *independently of Himself*. And is it not right it should be so? Is it not right, that, when God offers himself to you, in the fulness of his love, and of his power to bless you, as “the portion of your inheritance and cup,” and you refuse the offer—your punishment should be the fearfully and eternally felt experience that every other is vain?—that every other sweet should turn to bitterness—and all other fulness to emptiness?—that forsaking Him who is the only “fountain of living water,” and hewing out for yourselves other cisterns, you should be condemned to find them all, in the end, “broken cisterns that can hold no water?”—that, even if they should hold it during life, and you should drink to satiety, and say, “Stolen waters are sweet,” you should at last see them shattered to pieces by the hand of Death, and your souls left empty—empty for ever—the fountain from which you might have found true, and pure, and permanent joy being then eternally sealed. O come—come now to that fountain, while it remains open. Come to God. Make HIM your chief joy. And when you have given Him his proper place, all other things will yield their sweetness to you, according to their nature and their measure. Your happiness will then be—and there is no other—“GOD IN ALL THINGS, AND ALL THINGS IN GOD!”

LECTURE XLI.

PROV. XVI. 1—5.

“The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord. All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits. Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established. The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil. Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished.”

THE sentiment expressed in the first of these verses, according to the received translation, is this:—That it belongs to God, to furnish the heart with all wisdom and grace, by which it is prepared to dictate to the tongue the utterance of whatever is truly good and profitable.

Critics are agreed that the terms in the original will hardly bear this sense. The words are, literally, “To man the orderings of the heart; but from Jehovah the answer of the tongue.” They have accordingly been rendered by one*—“Man indeed forms his designs; but from Jehovah is the answer of the tongue:” and by another†—“Man may prepare his thoughts; but the utterance of the tongue is from the Lord.”

The meaning appears to be, that whatever thoughts and purposes are in a man’s mind,—whatever sentiments it may be his intention to utter; if they are such as are likely to have any influence, or to produce effects of any consequence,

* Schulzius—“Homo quidem capit consilia, sed a Deo responsio linguæ.”

† Hodgson.

—they are all under supreme control. We have an exemplification of the fact in the case of Balaam. The preparation of his mind and heart was *his own*. He left his country *on* the invitation of Balak, with a certain purpose; designing to utter what was in harmony with his “love of the wages of unrighteousness.” But “the Lord God turned the curse into a blessing.” He made the infatuated false prophet to feel his dependence; so that, bent as his heart was to utter *one* thing, his tongue was constrained to utter *another*.^{*} Thus it often is—in ways for which the speakers and agents themselves cannot at the time account. One of these ways is, that, by imperative, unanticipated circumstances, men are brought to say the very contrary of what they intended. They have previously made up their minds. But either their memory fails them, in a manner they are at a loss to understand, and that which they had with pains prepared forsakes them in the time of need; or something different occurs suddenly to the mind, just at the necessary juncture, which all their previous study had not suggested; or some incident—something it may be said or done by another, changes, in a moment, the current of their thoughts and the tenor of their words.

I have heard well-authenticated cases from ministers who were as far as possible from being *canters* or enthusiasts, of what they had prepared with much study unaccountably losing its hold of their minds, and another subject, they could not tell by what association, for they were sensible of none, so forcing itself upon their thoughts as to constrain them to speak upon it;—when subsequent results, in benefit to individuals who, in peculiar states of mind, were at the time among the number of their auditors, have shown the providential cause, and have rendered the occurrence a practical exemplification of the sentiment in the verse before us. In every case, there is complete divine control. A man may revolve in his mind or heart thoughts without number, but

^{*} The expression of this in the history is very pointed and strong. See Num. xxii. 18, 38; xxiii. 26; xxiv. 12, 13

he cannot so much as lisp or whisper one of them without God:—"the answer of the tongue is from the Lord."

Verse 2. "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes: but the Lord weigheth the spirits."

The general truth stated in the former part of this verse has its source in another—the *depravity* of our nature. That depravity has an effect upon the *conscience*, perverting its dictates. We have this exemplified in the whole history of *persecution*. Our Lord, in warning his disciples of what they might anticipate, says, "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service."* But did this false conviction absolve the actors from *guilt*? Far from it. The *reason* assigned in the very next verse shows this:—"These things shall they do unto you, because they have not known the Father nor me."† The ignorance was thus without excuse, from which the conduct originated; could the conduct itself, then, be innocent? Look at a particular case—that of Saul of Tarsus. His own words accord with the words of Christ, respecting the dictates of conscience—"I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth," Acts xxvi. 9. Did Paul mean to acquit himself of criminality when he said this? His whole manner of speaking of himself afterwards strikingly shows the contrary. Let one passage decide: "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus," 1 Tim. i. 12—14. He here represents himself as having been "the chief of sinners" in the course he had before pursued; and the grace that had saved him as specially wonderful. He cannot mean, therefore, his having acted "ignorantly in unbelief"

* See John xvi. 1, 2.

† Compare this verse with John xv. 21—25.

as an apology or palliation; seeing, otherwise than in unbelief he *could not* act, and seeing unbelief is ever represented as itself involving the most heinous guilt, on account of the principles of moral pravity to which it is invariably imputed. The probability is that the words “for I acted ignorantly in unbelief” are introduced parenthetically, rather as *accounting for* his conduct than *apologizing for* it.

Again: how very often does *self*-partiality prevent us from seeing the turpitude of particular actions or courses, which even to fellow-men—to neutral observers and judges—is flagrantly apparent! And further, whence comes it that men see *themselves* so very differently from the description given of them in the word of God? How come they to appear so right in their own eyes, when that word declares them “all gone astray”—“desperately wicked”—“hopeless”—“lost?” Comes it not from their applying to themselves and to their ways false standards of estimate—false weights and measures: not the all-perfect, spiritual, heart-searching law of the Holy God,—the God of light and love—but the current opinions of the world, the theories of human philosophy, the general average of character around them, the laws and usages of human governments, or the second table of God’s law (and that very erroneously understood) to the exclusion of the first? Or comes it not from their looking to words and actions, without due regard to the *principles* and *motives* by which they are influenced and dictated?

This *last* deception may be considered as specially meant here, from the antithesis in the verse—“But the Lord weigheth the spirits.” His “*weighing*,” signifies his perfectly ascertaining, by intuitive and unerring discernment, and exposing, to universal satisfaction, the good and the evil, with the precise relative proportions of each. His “weighing *the spirits*” implies that *here* the moral good or the moral evil really lies. The *mere action* is, in itself, incapable of either, independently of what it indicates in the agent. When we speak of a moral action, we mean the action of a moral agent. A dog or a man may do the same action,—may carry off, for instance, for their own use respectively, what is the property

of another. We never think of calling it a *moral* action in the dog; but we condemn the man for the commission of a crime against his neighbour, and a sin against his God. An action may even in its effects be beneficial, which, in regard to the doer of it, is inexcusably *bad*: it may be good in its results, but bad in its *principle*. It is the latter alone that constitutes its moral or immoral character. And oh! it is well for us to be constantly impressed with the solemn truth before us—that “*the Lord weigheth the spirits.*” It gives us a lesson in the duty of self-examination. We should *weigh our own spirits*. In the remembrance that our hearts are “deceitful above all things,” we should, in that duty, go carefully and faithfully to work; not satisfied with a mere surface-look; not regarding the word and the action merely, but jealously tracing each, as in the sight of God, to its secret source within; testing that source by the application of Bible criterions; desiring to detect not merely motives that are unmixedly evil, but every secret adulteration of motives that are in the main good—every alloy—every deteriorating ingredient; “keeping our hearts with all diligence;” and looking forward to that day, when the equal balances of heaven shall try—both in deed, and in principle and motive—“every man’s work of what sort it is.” That will be the great day of the “weighing of the spirits.” What a day of strange revelations! when all hearts shall be laid open as they are in “the eyes of Him with whom we have to do!” How much that here appears genuine shall then be found “reprobate silver!” How much that by its superficial appearance deceived the eyes of men, shall be shown to have been but the gilding and lackering of corruption! How much that passed for virtue, but the counterfeit of vice! How much that seemed sterling, when “weighed in the balances” shall be “found wanting!” How many masks of imposing comeliness shall be torn from concealed deformity! Of how many “whited sepulchres” shall the “dead men’s bones and all uncleanness” be thrown out to view! Let us anticipate that day of coming disclosure, when the Lord the Judge shall “bring to light the hidden things of darkness,

and make manifest the counsels of the hearts;" and let us faithfully "judge ourselves" that "we may not be judged."

And for the same reason which should make us faithful and severe in judging ourselves, we should feel it incumbent upon us to be charitable and cautious in our judgments of others. We cannot "weigh the spirits." Of actions and of words, in their nature and in their tendency, we are entitled to form our opinion, according to the principles and precepts of God's law. But there is often a great deal more freedom used, than there ought to be, with the *motives* and *intentions* of those by whom the actions are done and the words are spoken. We are apt to talk with as much confidence of the motives of others as if we had the divine prerogative of "searching the heart." Frequently, for instance, we conclude at once, from the actual result of what another has done, that such result was in his intention,—that the production of it was even the chief or only motive by which he was influenced. Whereas He who "weigheth the spirits" may know that the motive has been *the very reverse*; and that the actual result has arisen from an error in judgment, and may be grieving the well-intentioned agent even more than it does ourselves. Let us then while we search our own hearts to the very bottom, beware of usurping the divine right of pronouncing on the secrets of other hearts. To this, as to every thing else, the great law of Christian equity and charity clearly and fully applies—"Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

Verse 3. "Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established." The counsel here given implies the following things:—

1. That all our purposes and all our doings should be *according to God's will*. How is it possible for us to commit them to God otherwise? How can we look to God for a blessing on that which we know to be contrary to His mind, and displeasing in His sight? We ought not to form or to pursue any purpose, regarding which we are sensible that we cannot, without a consciousness of inconsistency and impiety, acknowledge God. We ought not, unless we can even do so

with confidence. The maxim by which, as Christians, we should be regulated, is to be found in the words—"Whatsoever is not of faith"—whatsoever does not proceed, that is, from a full *conviction of right*—"is sin."

2. That *none of our works can prosper without God.* His providential blessing and superintendence are indispensable to success in any one of them. When *His own* counsels require it, God can bring to nothing the best, and crown with success the worst devised of human plans. This is a lesson of which the divine word is full.*

3. That it is, therefore, the obvious and imperative *duty* of intelligent creatures to *own their dependence, and to seek, on all occasions, the divine countenance and blessing*:—a counsel we have had more than once before us: one which pervades the Bible; and to which, despite of all the speciousness which a sophistical infidelity may give to its theories and speculations, *natural conscience* gives its sanction—harmonizing with the dictates of unsophisticated reason.

4. That what is our duty is, at the same time, *our interest.* The act of committing all things into the hands of God to be regulated as He may see fit, preserves the spirit from corroding anxiety; from carefulness, and sleeplessness, and torturing apprehensions about the result. It "keeps the soul in peace."†

5. As before, a *general truth* is expressed,—namely, that God will graciously smile on the efforts, and accomplish the purposes and wishes of him who, in all that he does, piously and humbly acknowledges Him, and seeks His blessing. God will "*establish his thoughts*"—will second and prosper, and fulfil the purposes he forms, and the desires he cherishes, crowning his endeavours with success.

Verse 4. "The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil."—This verse has occasioned no small difficulty to interpreters; and without doubt it *is* difficult.

* See Psal. cxxvii. 1; Dan. v. 23; Jam iv. 13—16.

† Psal. cxxvii. 2; Isa. xxvi. 3, 4; Phil. iv. 6, 7.

The former part of it, indeed, regarded as a *general truth*, is involved in no perplexity. The perplexity lies in the latter. We can be at no loss to admit the proposition, that both in creation and in providence, all things must ultimately prove for the glory of the Maker and Ruler of the universe. And this, in reality, appears to be the great truth conveyed;—a truth which it would be as unreasonable to question, as it would be impious. There *is*, there *can* be nothing which God makes, and nothing which God either does, or permits to be done, which will not ultimately, in one way or another, be rendered instrumental to the furtherance of His glory. It is a truth, that all God's *works* praise him; and in the end, all God's *ways* shall praise him. He will bring a revenue of honour and adoration to himself from the whole, and from every part. The words have been rendered, "God hath made every thing for *his* purpose—or for *its* purpose." If we render them "for *his* purpose," the sense will be much the same as in our own translation. If we render them "for *its* purpose," the sense will be, (a very manifest truth) that every thing in nature is designed and adapted for some special purpose—to its appropriate end. And then there will be intended a *comparison*: that *as* God hath made every thing for its purpose, *so* also has He made even "the wicked for the day of evil." Still here lies the difficulty—the perplexing knot. What is the sense, in which the Lord, who has "made everything for Himself," is said to have made the wicked for the day of evil? There are *two* things which it cannot mean. The *first* is, that God ever *made a wicked creature*; that any rational creature ever came from His forming hand, imbued with the principles of evil. That God has made creatures who have subsequently fallen and *become* wicked, is a matter of fact. But God never either *made a wicked creature*, or *made a creature wicked*; never created a mind in a state of depravity; and never into a mind that was created pure, *infused* the principles of depravity. These things—as they are far from God, be far from all our conceptions of Him! The *second* is, that God ever made an intelligent creature for the purpose of rendering that creature miserable;—

or, to use the common phrase, that God ever *made any man, to damn him!* The first end of God in creation is his own glory. It *must* be so, unless we can conceive anything to which that glory should give way as being of inferior consequence:—and the second is the gratification of his benevolence in the production of happiness. *Why* this benevolent God has permitted evil to enter into his creation, is an inquiry *too high for us*. The *fact* is certain; and we cannot hesitate in believing, that in the long-run, God will make this part of his providential scheme to produce the largest amount of both glory to his name and benefit to the universal frame of being. But that God's *end*, in bringing any intelligent creature into existence, *was that creature's misery*, it is *blasphemy*,—and to every mind that desires to cherish veneration and love towards the divine Being—it is *agony* to imagine.

Setting such ideas aside, I would remark, that much of the meaning of the whole clause depends on the sense we affix to "*the day of evil*."

1. It is generally understood, and I have myself been accustomed so to explain it, of the day of *final visitation and suffering to the wicked themselves*. Supposing this to be the meaning, the sentiment expressed will be, that Jehovah, having made and destined all things for Himself, will cause even wicked men, who for the time may seem to be exceptions to that truth, and to be counteracting the purpose of promoting his glory, to subserve that end at last, in "the day of evil"—by their righteous punishment—their final overthrow and destruction: and that there is the same *fitness* in His thus "reserving the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished," as there is in any adaptation in nature or in providence. The words, in this view of them, have been finely rendered by Archbishop Tillotson—"God hath ordained everything to that which is fit to it; and the wicked He hath ordained for the day of evil: that is, the wisdom of God hath fitted one thing to another, punishment to sin, the *evil day* to the *evil-doer*." And thus, we may add, God will provide for the honour of his name and government—

"What," says Paul, "if God, willing to shew wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?" Rom. ix. 22, 23. Those, observe, who are "fitted to destruction" are not said to be so fitted *by God*, as it is said of the "vessels of mercy" that "he before *prepared them* to glory." No. The ungodly *fit themselves* for destruction; and God forbears the immediate infliction of their punishment,—allowing them to take their course, and to work out their principles of evil, with mad infatuation, to the uttermost, that *in that punishment* when it *is* inflicted, He may the more surely and effectually make His righteousness apparent.

2. But I am now inclined to doubt whether "*the day of evil*" has here this meaning at all. There is another, of which it is alike susceptible, and which, in the Scriptures, it frequently bears—namely, the day of punitive visitation, in the infliction of judicial vengeance, in the course of God's providential administration. I question if the *suffering* of the wicked be intended, and am disposed to refer the phrase to the *instrumental agency* of the wicked. The expression, "The LORD hath made all things for himself," will thus mean, that He employs all as instruments in effecting his purposes; and that thus He makes the wicked as a part of his agency; employing them, without at all interfering with their freedom and their responsibility, as the executioners of wrath, "when He cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity;"—thus rendering their very passions the means of accomplishing his designs; making "the wrath of man to praise him, and restraining the remainder of wrath."

Verse 5. "Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished." It is of vast importance that we bear in mind what *is* the "pride of heart that is abomination to the Lord."

1. There is a gentleness and condescending affability, that

springs from mere natural disposition; and which may exist while *pride*, in the sight of God, is cherished and indulged in all its ungodly loftiness. While possessing such a disposition in the highest degree, a man may hate with his whole heart the humbling representations of the gospel, and the unconditional grace which it reveals. He may disdain the lowly, self-abasing language of the “broken and contrite heart,” as language not at all befitting *his* lips. He may assume the portly self-justifying attitude of the Pharisee, and cast the side-long look of scorn at the penitent publican. But a man of this stamp, whatever his fellow-men may think of him, is of “the proud in heart whom the Lord *abhorreth*.”

2. There are some, again, who are full of the language of the deepest self-condemnation:—no terms are strong enough to express their sense of their own vileness and unworthiness. Yet they are of “the proud in heart,” after all. They are lowly in words but high in spirit. Pride dictates their very humiliation. They wish to be commended for their lowliness, and to be assured that they think worse of themselves than others do; that they are by no means the worthless wretches they make themselves; that they possess excellencies to which their humility makes them blind. Then, again, *when* thus flattered, they shake their heads and protest against it in terms of still stronger self-loathing; while all the time they are pleased with it, and only wish to draw out a little more of what falls so sweetly upon the ear of their vanity, and feasts their inward self-elation. They want a *character* for humility, while yet they are the very opposite of humble. They will show this at once, if you only agree with the ill they say of themselves; and come to close quarters with them as to actual *bonâ fide* faults. And not a few, moreover, who are all lowliness before God, are high and irritable, touchy and resentful in their intercourse with men.

I must then afresh urge on you the truth, that the first ingredient in true humility before God, is a heart-breaking conviction of sin, and exposure to wrath, with the deep

feeling and the lowly confession of entire dependence on God's mercy, and of owing all to the riches of His grace. Every other feature and modification of Christian humility must germinate from this. And from such a truly humble state of heart many are the descriptions of pride that keep sinners of mankind:—the pride of self-righteousness; the pride of wisdom; the pride of station; and what appears to be especially alluded to in the verse—the *pride of rebellion*—obstinate daring rebellion, in which men combine and encourage one another:—“*Though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished.*” The proud of all sorts may encourage one another in such rebellion—in holding out against all terms of submission not in accordance with what they affect to think *due to themselves!* O the mad presumption! *Due to themselves!* What is it that is due to *them?* Is it not just what is due to *all*, as having “sinned, and come short of the glory of God?” Yes; and where shall their pride be, in the day when God riseth up? There shall be a vast assembly on the left hand of the Judge. Will they then unite against him? Will they *then* join hand in hand to resist the execution of His sentence? O the felt impotence—the trembling helplessness—of that multitude! Every heart shall quail before those eyes that, “as a flame of fire,” shall search their inmost souls;—before the purity and the power of Him whose mercy they have despised till it was too late to find it;—the purity and the power of Him whom they refused as their Saviour, but who, having exchanged the cross for the throne, shall then, as Judge, vindicate, in the destruction of his enemies, the righteousness of the divine government, and the insulted honour of the divine name.

“O be no longer mockers, lest your bands be made strong.” “Humble yourselves.” Come to God *as sinners*, and as suppliants for mercy. He will “in no wise cast you out.” Come in *pride*—you perish. Come in your own name—you perish. But come with a broken and contrite heart, in the name of Jesus, and as sure as He is the true God and the God of truth, he will stretch forth his arms to welcome you!

LECTURE XLII.

PROV. XVI. 6—15.

“By mercy and truth iniquity is purged; and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil. When a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right. A man’s heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps. A divine sentence is in the lips of the king; his mouth transgresseth not in judgment. A just weight and balance are the Lord’s; all the weights of the bag are his work. It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness. Righteous lips are the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh right. The wrath of the king is as messengers of death; but a wise man will pacify it. In the light of the king’s countenance is life; and his favour is as the cloud of the latter rain.”

Two things are necessary to be noticed in regard to the language of the first of these verses, in order to our arriving at the true interpretation of it, and the principle of harmony between it and other parts of Scripture:—

1. The word here translated “*purged*,” is the same with that so rendered in other places, and is the word which strictly and properly signifies *expiation* or *atonement*: and—

2. *Mercy and truth*, being here put generally, may mean mercy and truth either as exercised on the part of *God* or as practised by *men*.

Now, as we have already said, there is not a sentiment more directly in the face of the entire tenor of the word of God, than the sentiment, that the practice of “*mercy and truth*,” on the part of men, can operate as an atonement or expiation for the guilt of their sins. It is a very favourite sentiment; but one which no man can hold, and, with any consistency,

profess to believe the Bible. I do not deny, that the abandonment of unrighteousness and oppression, and the adoption of the principles and the practice of truth, justice, and mercy, may be a means of averting temporal calamities—suspending the execution of them for a time, or even removing them altogether;—as when Daniel said to king Nebuchadnezzar, “Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thy iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity,” Dan. iv. 27. And were it not for the use of the proper word for *expiation*, and the general unqualified form in which the statement in this verse is made, such an interpretation might have been admissible. We might have restricted the application of the words to the manner in which the God of mercy and truth—the God who himself “delighteth in mercy,” and who “requireth truth in the inward parts”—manifests his regard to the practice of these virtues by his creatures. There is a scriptural sense too, in which mercy and truth, and the kindred graces, impart confidence towards God:—but it is only as *evidential* of interest in the salvation by grace which the divine word reveals; it is neither as *meritorious*, nor as *expiatory*. It is obviously in this way that we are to interpret the language of James, “He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment,” Jam. ii. 13. The best commentary on “*mercy rejoicing against judgment*”—that is, imparting peace, security, and joy to the soul before God the Judge—is the Saviour’s own description of the solemn transactions of the judgment-day.* The works of mercy He describes, as done to “his brethren” *for his sake*, were done from *love to him*, and consequently from *faith in him*. They are thus graciously stamped with his approval, and, as evidence of those who did them being *his*, are interposed between them and condemnation. But in this there is nothing of *expiation* or *atonement*.

* Mat. xxv. 34—36, 40.

The purging away, or expiation of sin, is invariably, in the Scriptures, put upon a different ground. There is but ONE EXPIATION—typified by all the ancient sacrifices, and offered up, in the fulness of time, on Calvary. To suppose the faithfulness and kindness of one man to another to expiate guilt, is to set aside the entire scheme of the divine Saviour's mediation.

I regard "mercy and truth" here as having reference to *God*,—to the exercise and manifestation of these perfections of his character, in the scheme of human redemption. This view is strongly supported by such passages as these. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old." "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."*

I cannot but consider the entire verse, when the two parts of it are taken together, as briefly expressing what God has done for the salvation of man—for expiating his guilt and restoring him to favour; and the character, in principle and practice, which arises out of an interest by faith in this atonement and salvation. By "mercy and truth," on the part of God, men's sins are expiated and forgiven;—and, in consequence, "by the fear of the Lord," springing from the faith that introduces to this forgiveness, "men depart from evil." Thus, in the language of the Psalmist—"There is forgiveness with God, *that he may be feared*." And when by the faith of the atonement sinners are brought to the fear of God, they "walk in newness of life."

Then we have, in the next adage, one of the many happy

* Psal. lxxxv. 10: Mic. vii. 18—20: John i. 17.

effects which result to those who so walk:—"When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."*

Not that *a good man shall never have any enemies*. The contrary, alas! we see and know; and the contrary the word of God, both by the views it gives us of human nature, and by many express declarations, teaches us to expect. Indeed, the very verse itself implies the contrary. *Enemies* are expressly supposed to exist. And it is of these enemies that it is here said, God "maketh them to be at peace with him." The meaning evidently is, that often when the fears of God's people are excited in regard to those enemies,—when they are trembling for the consequences of their hostility, thinking all over with them—the wrath is averted—the enemy's power broken, or his feelings changed, and rendered, for the time at least, friendly. Thus it was in the case of Jacob with Esau; and, in different instances in that of Saul with David. And thus it was in the case of another Saul, in New Testament days, who, from "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," and "being exceedingly mad against them," became one of the warmest, and most devoted friends of Christ and his cause. God gave promise by Jeremiah to his ancient people—"Verily I will cause the enemy to entreat thee well in the time of evil and in the time of affliction," Jer. xv. 11. The divine Saviour also makes a similar promise, by the Apostle John, to one of his churches, and thus, in like circumstances, to them all.† It has been briefly and tersely said—"The best way to have enemies reconciled to us, is for us to be reconciled to God." When we are thus reconciled, even when enemies are permitted to rise up against us, and "such as breathe out cruelty," yet may we say with confidence, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"—and to our brethren so situated, "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?"

There may be in the language more especial reference to

* Comp. Job v. 23.

† Rev. iii. 9.

those parts of the good man's conduct which have raised up enemies against him, springing from his resolute adherence to what God commands and conscience approves, in spite of all remonstrance, threatening, persuasion, and even tears; and in the full knowledge of the painful result, that those whom he would fain number still amongst his friends must be rendered hostile, and assume the attitude of alienation and resentment. When a child of God acts thus decidedly, and makes himself enemies from "conscience toward God," by following out the principle—" *We must obey God rather than men;*"—that God whom he obeys, and for whom he suffers, will stand by him. He will disappoint his fears, (how often has He done it!) and make the very admiration of his firm yet mild and dignified consistency to work, through conscience, on the hearts of his foes, and convert them into his friends—sometimes his warmest and most valuable friends: and not only into *his* friends, but through his instrumentality, and through the very consistency which at first provoked them, into friends of God.—All this has not unfrequently happened in regard to the godly man's ungodly *relatives*. An instance of it occurred in my reading the other day. The Rev. Edwin Sidney, in his Memoir of the Rev. Rowland Hill, gives the following incident. "At the close of his life, he was walking on the terrace at Hawkstone" (the residence of one of his brothers) "when he remarked to a lady who was with him, and who had witnessed the affectionate attentions which were paid him by Sir John Hill and his family,—‘You have seen how I am now received here; but in my youth I have often paced this spot, bitterly weeping, while by most of the inhabitants of yonder house I was considered as a disgrace to my family. But,’ he added, whilst the tears ran down his cheeks—‘it was for the cause of God.’" And this instance is only one of thousands.—Even in cases where affection has not been won, the Lord has many a time, by providential incidents and by secret influences, direct or indirect, upon the mind, kept His servants in peace, preventing the wrath from breaking out—laying an unseen and unaccountable restraint

upon it, and giving peace even in the midst of cherished and strong enmity. Daniel has been in peace, in the lions' den. God has "shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt him." When He has sent forth his servants on his embassies, "as sheep among wolves," the savage passions of their infuriated opponents have been restrained, and have even been, by divine grace, tamed into gentleness, so that the "wolf has dwelt with the lamb, and the leopard lain down with the kid."

Yes, my friends; and, without going far astray from the *spirit* of the words, I may add, that there is *one* enemy—the most dreaded of all by guilty nature—whom God "makes to be at peace" with "those whose ways please Him;"—*Death*, "the last enemy—the king of terrors." The believer fears him not. He hails him as a friend. To *him* the spectral form of the monarch of the grave brings no alarm. He comes "a messenger of peace, to call his soul to heaven."

And "when a man's ways please the Lord," it matters not what may be his situation in life. "There is no respect of persons with God." With the man who is "humble and of a contrite heart, and trembleth at his word," He delights to "dwell," whether in the palace or in the cottage;—and from the palace He retires, when it is the abode of sin, to take up his abode in the cottage "wherein dwelleth righteousness."

Thus it follows—verse 8. "Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right."

Taking the words in their *general* acceptation, without entering into the shades of difference between the term used for *righteousness*, and that for *right*—we may remark, that the "little with righteousness" is *better* than the "great revenues without right" in many respects.—1. They who have the "little with righteousness"—righteousness in the *acquisition* and righteousness in the *use*, have it with a *good conscience*; which they whose abundance is without right can never enjoy.—2. It produces less distraction and temptation to worldliness and forgetfulness of God,—the great curse of wealth; and exerts less of an absorbing influence on the

affections and desires.—3. It is received *as* a blessing from a Father's hand, and is enjoyed *with* a blessing from a Father's heart; whereas "revenues without right" can neither be regarded as divinely bestowed nor as divinely blessed.—4. The "little with righteousness" meets the wants and the bounded desires of its possessor. Righteous before God, and cherishing towards God the spirit of confidence which He requires, he has "learned, in whatsoever state he is, therewith to be content"—which is the great secret of true enjoyment, and which all the revenues of earth without the grace of God *must* fail to impart.—5. He who has "little with righteousness," *uses* the little better; whereas he who *gets* without principle cannot be expected to put much principle into his *spending*. And for the encouragement of the poorest it is written, in regard to the employment of earthly means, "It is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not."—6. He who has little has no fears disturbing him of change for the worse; and having his little with right,—and as one under the power of principles which God approves, the principles of true religion,—he has the prospect before him, beyond all the privations and trials of his present poor and pinching condition,—of something infinitely better and more lasting than all the revenues, *with* right or *without* it, that this world can ever furnish to its most devoted worshippers—the blessed prospect of "the inheritance of the saints in light;" where, having on earth "received his *evil* things," he shall be eternally "filled with all the fulness of God!"

Verse 9. "A man's heart," that is his *mind*, his inward powers, of reflection, anticipation, skill, prudence, "*deviseth* his way"—a term implying the application of all possible consideration, invention, and precaution—but "the Lord directeth his steps." The words express and expose the folly and presumption, on man's part, of *self-confidence*—of his thus assuring himself of success, as if he had the future under his eye and at his bidding; regardless of that hidden but ever-present, ever-busy superintending Power, that has all under complete command; that can at once arrest his progress in

the very midst and at the very height of his boasting, and "turn to foolishness" all his devices. The sacred Oracles are full of the sentiment and of the most striking exemplifications of its truth.* And what is the sentiment of revelation cannot fail to command the concurrence of enlightened reason. It *must* be so. If there is a God at all it cannot be otherwise. It were the height of irrationality as well as impiety for a moment to question it—to imagine the contrary *possible*. How otherwise could God govern the world? Were not all human schemes under supreme and irresistible control,—what would become of the certainty of the divine? All must of necessity fulfil the plans of Infinite Wisdom in the administration of God's universal government. God "will work, and who shall let it?"

Verse 10. "A divine sentence is in the lips of the king: his mouth transgresseth not in judgment."

Solomon being himself a king, it is no matter of surprise that he should occasionally touch on the duties of royalty. His object here is to set forth what kings *ought to be*, and what *good kings always are*. Such is the character of human government, *as* ordained of God—a divine institute for the well-being of men.

The terms of this verse might be considered as having in them a truth specially applicable to the kings of Israel and Judah. They reigned under a theocracy. Jehovah himself had given laws to his chosen people. It was the duty of the kings to have these laws before them, and to govern in all things according to them. Anticipating the exercise of the kingly authority, God had expressly given command to this effect by Moses.† A sentence, therefore, which was according to this law, was, in the strictest sense, "a *divine* sentence." It was of God's express dictation. But the words may be understood of kings more generally.

"A *divine* sentence" may be understood either as to its *character*, or as to its *authoritative effect*. If taken in the former sense, it means a sentence according to perfect

* See chap. xix. 21; xx. 24; xxi. 30.

† Deut. xvii. 18—20.

equity—in harmony with the character of Him of whom it is said—"He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is He." If in the latter sense, the idea is, that as every judgment or "sentence" of God is *decisive* and *effectual*, so that the execution of it cannot be evaded or resisted, such, in measure, is the case with the sentences of kings among men: and in the general idea of a *divine* sentence may fairly be included both character and efficiency—both equity and power. When understood of *equity*, the latter part of the verse, according to the principle of Hebrew parallelisms, will be a kind of counterpart or echo to the former—"A divine sentence is in the lips of the king; his mouth transgresseth not in judgment." When understood of *power*, the verse might be rendered—"A divine sentence is in the lips of the king: *let not* his mouth transgress in judgment:"—in proportion to the authoritative and efficacious nature of his sentence, ought he to see to it that the sentence be right:—he should weigh well his decision ere he pronounces it, seeing it involves consequences so certain, immediate, and important. And the principle of this lesson applies to all in situations of authority and influence, whether more private or more public. As does also the lesson of equity from the character of God, as a just God—"the righteous Lord who loveth righteousness."

The *principle* is, in the spirit of it, repeated in next verse—"A just weight and balance are the Lord's; all the weights of the bag are his work."

The laws of Moses were adverted to in our comment on this subject on a former occasion.* They are most pointed and strict, and heavy the denunciations against the violators of them. The Jews are said to have kept their standard weights and measures *in the sanctuary*. The fact might arise from the particularity of the law; and might operate as a remembrancer of the righteousness of Him by whom the law was given and the weights and measures fixed. And it fur-

* Chap. xi. 1.

nishes, at the same time, an interesting commentary on the words in this verse. They are "*the Lord's*"—they are "*his work*." All adulteration of them was a kind of *sacrilege*. It was not cheating men merely, but defrauding Jehovah,—changing what He had fixed. The general idea is, that the weights and measures should be held *sacred*, like all else that belongs to God, so that encroachment upon them should be considered as profanation, which God himself would avenge. And, from the connexion in which the words are here introduced, they lead us to observe, that while kings are called upon to "do justly" themselves in their whole administration, and in every department of it, it is, at the same time, a most important part of their official duty to promote among their subjects, to the utmost extent of their power, the principles and the practice of equity between man and man. The prevalence, indeed, of mutual confidence is indispensable to the comfort and prosperity of society,—nay to the very existence of a community that, to any extent, depends on trade and commerce. Destroy such confidence, and all the intercourse of business is at once annihilated—cut up by the very roots.

Verse 12. "It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness." This verse is susceptible of various interpretations, as—1. "For *kings* to commit wickedness is abomination; for the throne is established by righteousness." This view presents a sentiment to which none can possibly refuse their assent. For *any* man to "commit wickedness" is an abomination—an abomination to God and to all holy creatures, and it is peculiarly so for those who hold stations of authority and influence. It is theirs to give the tone to public morals and manners. This invests them with a special responsibility.

2. The verse may be read—"Let it be an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness:" that is, kings *ought* to hold wickedness in abhorrence in their own conduct; and that, whether *personal* or *official*. A distinction is at times made between the *man* and his *office*; or between the man personally and

the man officially; which, if pushed far, may be very prejudicial. It goes to this—that a man may be a very good magistrate, though he is a very bad man; that private character has little or no connexion with the discharge of public functions. This is surely a pernicious mistake. The two should, as far as possible, be in union. The best security for upright and correct official conduct is uprightness of private character. There never can be full confidence in a government, of which the conductors, supreme and subordinate, are, in their private deportment, destitute of principle. Principle in the personal character will alone resist temptation to malversation in public office. We have no certain hold of a man otherwise.

3. The *third* view is probably the right one—that “wickedness” *in general* “is an abomination to kings;” that is, *ought to be, and in regard to every good king will be*—“for the throne is established by righteousness.” That such is the true meaning is likely from the verse that follows, which presents an evident contrast to this. A virtuous, flourishing, comfortable, and happy population will scare away from the throne all apprehensions of seditious and revolutionary movements. Such a people will wish for no change; and against any enemy that would introduce change will defend with their heart’s blood the government under which they enjoy such prosperity. On the contrary, the extensive prevalence of opposite principles,—very often the result of misgovernment, will prevent prosperity, will produce poverty and discomfort, will cherish discontent, will foment insubordination, and excite wishes for change, and render the country a mass of combustible materials which requires but the striking of a spark to ensure a universal explosion. Then the throne is in incessant insecurity. It stands amongst gunpowder. It is surrounded with terrors. Its occupant can be in peace only from ignorance. Let it be laid down as a settled maxim, that the best security of “*the throne*” is in the *virtue of its subjects*; that the diffusion of knowledge and of religious and moral principle, is the best means of ensuring the loyal, peaceable, happy submission of the peo-

ple. Equal laws, equal rights, equal privileges, equal favour to all in their respective departments of occupation; a fair field for every one, and no partiality in either immunities or restrictions, in trade, in science, or in religion,—will do much to produce this desirable condition of things. And “the righteousness which exalteth the nation” will place its throne on a firm basis, and surround it with the truest glory.*

Verse 13. “Righteous lips are the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh right.” Ah! would that this could be truly predicated as matter of *universal fact*! Well had it been, and well would it be, both for princes and for people! But history tells another tale; and we must again regard the words as the statement of what *ought to be*, rather than of what *is*,—of the character, not of all kings, but of the truly *good* king.—The flatteries, the wiles, the falsehoods, the treacherous smiles and selfish heartlessness of courtiership, have been proverbial from the beginning. It has been in every age a complaint, and one alas! too well founded, that princes *do not hear truth*,—that, from fear or from favour, it does not reach their ears. There have been, and there are, honourable exceptions; but a *courtier* has long been a term almost synonymous with a man versed in all the arts of simulation and chicane.—Of how many princes, in ancient or more modern times, has this been (though, perchance, a present gratification to them) the ultimate wretchedness and ruin! Falsehood and flattery are often for the time more palatable than faithfulness and truth. When the lying lips of the parasite pour into the open ear of royalty the false and delusive maxim that the people are made for the prince, not the prince for the people; when they place the ruler above the law, and pronounce the ruler’s pleasure the criterion of the ruler’s duty, and his will what should bind all, and be itself unbound:—when a profligate minister recommends measures according to what he knows to be the caprice of his royal master, or his unhappily obstinate prejudices, rather than according to what he knows just and libe-

* See chap. xiv. 34.

ral views of the public good to require;—the deceived prince becomes the dupe of treachery; and his throne may be tottering to its base when he is fancying it most secure. Happy is it for the prince who feels and acts as this verse describes; who desires honest and faithful counsel; who prefers *unpalatable* truth to palatable falsehood; who rejects with dignity and scorn the advisers whom he detects putting a bandage over his eyes, and who places those proportionally near to him and in the light of his favour, who assist him to see clearly things as they actually are, and suggest, with the fidelity of conscientious conviction, the measures that will make things as they ought to be!—The best commentary on the verse before us, as descriptive of the character of a *good king*, may be found in the resolutions of the father of Solomon—Psa. ci. 1—8.

Verses 14, 15. “The wrath of the king is as messengers of death: but a wise man will pacify it. In the light of the king’s countenance is life; and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain.”—These verses contain a striking contrast between the effects of *royal displeasure*, and of *royal favour*. The sentiment of the former verse was strikingly true then of the capricious fury of Eastern despots; and in all arbitrary governments it is so still. Human nature remains the same; and hence the tendencies of absolute power remain the same. It has been truly said, that *absolute power is safe in no hands but those of God*. Many a time have those Eastern despots, whose will was law, and their frown death to their trembling vassals, when any one had done them a displeasure, given “*the messengers of death*” their secret and summary commission,—consigning the victim of their resentment, without trial and without warning, to the dungeon, and giving him his choice of the bowl or the bowstring.—On the contrary, “in the light of the king’s countenance is life; and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain.” “Life” here, as in other places, means prosperity and joy—*happy* life. And “a cloud of the latter rain” may be regarded as the emblem at once of *pleasure* and of *benefit*. The shower which it pours down to

water the earth is at once refreshing and fructifying. Thus to Haman the wrath of Ahasuerus was as "messengers of death," while to Mordecai his favour was "as a cloud of the latter rain." Thus to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the wrath of the incensed Nebuchadnezzar was the "messenger of death;" but when their God had preserved them in the sevenfold heated furnace, and turned the wrath of the king into astonishment and repentance, his favour returned to them like "the cloud of latter rain." Thus to the enemies of Daniel was the wrath of Darius; and thus to Daniel himself was his favour.

The prudence of every "*wise man*" will seek to avert "the wrath" and to secure "the favour" of one who has so much in his power,—not, if he be a man of *principle* as well as prudence, in any way inconsistent with honour and integrity,—but by all means which do not compromise these; as by every becoming, though by no undignified and sycophantish, concession.* Of such wisdom—the wisdom of "the children of this world," we have an example in the conduct of the men of Tyre and Sidon to the ambitious and vindictive Herod.† Theirs was *carnal* policy,—the unprincipled prudence of selfishness, escaping evil to itself by fulsome, impious, and as it proved, destructive adulation to the aspiring pride of another. Let us be thankful that we live in a land of liberty, where the law is above the royal will,—where, without the law, "the wrath of the king" is impotent; where, (and, though in some respects it may be questionable, yet is it a beautiful provision of the Constitution) though the supreme power has the privilege of remitting a sentence of death by showing mercy, there is no right of reversing at will a sentence of acquittal, and consigning to death when the law has awarded life. It is the characteristic prerogative of the ruler of a free country—of a law-controlled prince in opposition to a prince-controlled law.

Suffer a few closing reflections.—

1. What was said, in the course of exposition, on the im-

* Comp. Eccl. x. 4.

† See Acts xii. 20—24.

portance of deliberation in giving judgment, may be said in regard to *the publication of opinions*. No man should form his sentiments hastily; and far less should he hastily enunciate them; especially when he has reason to know that his opinion will go far with any considerable portion of the community. He should, in that case, be solicitous that every sentence to which he gives utterance on any subject should be a "divine sentence"—one in harmony with the mind of God. Men are at times tempted, by the very circumstance of their having got the public ear, to give forth their opinions more crudely, pluming themselves on their intuitive quickness, and trusting to their oracular authority. But conduct the very reverse should be the result of the confidence placed in their judgment; the greater should be the anxiety not to do harm by presuming on that confidence,—but to be all the surer of their ground.

2. He is the truest patriot, the best friend of his country, who contributes most to the extension of the knowledge, the virtue, and the religion of the people. That man more effectually advances its true interests, its solid greatness, its prosperity, its happiness, and the safety and stability of its government, than he who augments its resources of wealth and power and territory, and means of hostile aggression. The best educated, and the most moral people; and above all, the people among whom there is the most extensive prevalence of the principles of true religion, will invariably be, as they are the best, the happiest people; and the throne of such a nation the most secure and well-established. The surest way to provide for the political and commercial prosperity of BRITAIN is to seek the advancement in her of knowledge, religion, and sound morality,—in the train of which all else that is good will securely follow. And this implies, that we use such influence as we have, in a legitimate form, to avert such measures as might tend to the deterioration of the country, directly or indirectly, in her most important interests,—by multiplying temptations to crime, and, through the abridgment of the resources for obtaining education to the rising generation, ensuring ignorance, with

all its wretched results, as the future character of the community.

Finally, whatever, in the form of good, is true of the best princes on earth, is all true, without the slightest alloy or drawback, of the King of Zion. His abhorrence of evil is infinite. The authority and the certain efficacy of His word are absolute. Every sentence of His is truly "a divine sentence" worthy of being executed, and as *sure* as it is worthy. Fearful and fatal are the effects of His displeasure, and the excellence of His favour is above all price. O! if you would deprecate the anger, and desire the favour of a fellow-creature who had it even in his power to kill the body, or to ruin your interests for time; how can you think of living for another day, another hour, another moment, under the frown of God, and in a state of exposure to His wrath? Truly may it be said of this wrath, "*a wise man will pacify it.*" But there is no way which human wisdom could ever have devised to "pacify it." It can be pacified towards *you*—not by any means of your own devising, but only by your acquiescing in that which God has devised. The Lord Jesus Christ is your peace. In HIM Jehovah is well pleased. In Him he waits to be gracious. He has no pleasure in sending against you the messengers of death, but rather delights in waiting over your souls as a cloud of the latter rain, ready to discharge its shower of blessing!

LECTURE XLIII.



PROV. XVI. 16—26.

“How much better is it to get wisdom than gold? and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver? The highway of the upright is to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul. Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better is it to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud. He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good; and whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he. The wise in heart shall be called prudent; and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning. Understanding is a well-spring of life unto him that hath it: but the instruction of fools is folly. The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips. Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones. There is a way that seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death. He that laboureth, laboureth for himself; for his mouth craveth it of him.”

THE first of these verses might be taken in connexion with what immediately precedes. In the fourteenth verse, one of the benefits of wisdom is mentioned; namely, its suggesting to its possessor the desirableness, and the most eligible means, of evading impending danger from the displeasure of those in authority: “The wrath of the king is as messengers of death: but a wise man will pacify it.” In *this* respect, then, “How much better is it to get wisdom than gold? and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver?” What wisdom thus effects, riches cannot. Wealth, and its attendant influence, may even lead to the opposite result—exciting the prince’s jealousy; and where they are possessed *without* wisdom, they are the more likely to produce this evil. And if ordinary wisdom is, on such accounts,

preferable to riches—O how strongly does the sentiment apply to true, heavenly, divine wisdom, as delivering from the wrath not of any mere earthly monarch, but of the “King of kings,” the Ruler of the universe!*

The same lesson, under another form, is conveyed by the next verse, “The highway of the upright is to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul.”—“*The highway*” is the way which Jehovah, the God of heaven, has “cast up.” It is the way of the “*upright*”—the way of God’s people; and it is “*to depart from evil.*” As the man who has turned his back upon a place, taking the road that leads most directly from it, and anxiously pressing on in that road, to get as fast and as far from it as possible,—so is “*the upright*” man in regard to *sin*. He has turned his back upon it. He has, with decided step, taken God’s “*highway*,” and will not be tempted into any of sin’s devious paths: for well he knows that he, and he only, “that keepeth his way”—the way of *faith* and *obedience*; the faith of God’s truth, and the obedience of God’s precepts, “*preserveth his soul.*”

Verse 18. “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.”† Many are the exemplifications of this left on record in God’s word. It was when Nebuchadnezzar’s heart was lifted up with pride—when in a spirit of self-elation he said, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” that he was visited with the most humiliating of heaven’s chastisements; until he was constrained to acknowledge Jehovah’s supremacy, and to publish the lesson—“Them that walk in pride He is able to abase.” It was when his son Belshazzar “*humbled not himself*, though he knew this, but lifted himself up against the Lord of heaven,” and “praised the gods of silver and gold,” and profaned the sacred vessels of Jehovah, bringing upon himself the charge—“The God in whose hand thy

* On the *general sentiment*, in regard to wisdom, see chap. iii. 15—18: iv. 7: viii. 10, 11, 18—21.

† See chap. xi. 2: xv. 25, 33, &c.

breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified"—that his doom was written on his palace-wall by the hand of mystery and dread; and that night the terrible doom fulfilled.—And in the experience of his people God has often checked and punished the obnoxious principle. David suffered for it when he numbered the people; and Hezekiah suffered for it when he made his ostentatious display to the ambassadors of Babylon.

Verse 19. "Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud." In many respects "*it is better.*" The spirit of the humble is contented, unaspiring, cheerful, submissive; and happier by far is this spirit than that of "*the proud.*" who may indeed have the temporary advantage—may "*divide the spoil*"—may obtain and exult over the plunder of their fallen rivals—may revel in the attainment of their property and their honour: but, after all, their riches and their glory are no more than—

“—— meteors in the midnight sky,
That glitter for a while and die.”

They “flash, and fade.” The higher their elevation, the deeper their fall. The brighter their splendour, the gloomier the darkness by which it is succeeded!

The connexion is sufficiently natural between this verse and what follows. *Pride* renders him who is the subject of it hasty and rash. Impatient precipitation is one of its distinctive features. Humble-mindedness is necessary to steady, cautious, discreet action. Hence, “he that handleth a matter wisely shall find good.” The obvious sense is—that thorough understanding of business and prudent management of it, *tend* to ensure a prosperous issue. And if the business is another's, the intelligent, cautious, successful conducting of it, will procure benefit by the favour it conciliates, and the character it establishes. One business well conducted brings a man another. This is the way to get forward in the world. And in proportion as the intrusted transaction is difficult and delicate, will the “handling of it wisely” prove advantageous.—Still there is no amount of human understanding and discretion

that can render success in any transaction *certain*. The result rests with *God*. Hence a very natural connexion of the latter clause of the verse with the former:—"And," or but, "whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he." Here is the true secret of happiness—the *union, in all things, of prudence and diligence, with trust in God*. Trust must be associated with effort. And when it pleases God, after all has been done within the limits of human power, to withhold the blessing, our happiness lies in the faith that *all is well*;—that GOD sees it to be so,—and that, had we the eye of God—the eye that "seeth the end from the beginning," we should be fully satisfied of this; and discover that any change, such as would have conformed the result more to our anticipations and wishes, would have been "for the worse." It is also a comfort and satisfaction, when we are disappointed, to feel that we have "*done what we could*." Disappointment is thus resolved into the *will of God*; whose will, while sovereign, is ever determined by a wisdom incapable of error, a faithfulness incapable of failure, and a love incapable of any step really and ultimately injurious to its objects,—and thus the heart is at rest in the Lord.

Let it be further observed, that "handling a matter *wisely*" does not mean handling it *cunningly*, with artifice and what the apostle calls "*fleshly wisdom*"—the *policy* of this world; but with a wisdom and prudence in harmony with the most rigid and straightforward integrity. Double-dealing may be misnamed wisdom; the arts of a tortuous cunning may be dignified with the designation of prudence; but when *such* wisdom, *such* prudence, has been employed, even the greatest amount of success can impart little that deserves the name of happiness. There can be none, where *conscience* interferes, and inserts its secret envenoming sting. And no man who is using the arts of a crooked policy can exercise *trust in God*. The two things are incompatible. Who can unite disobedience and confidence? What! act in opposition to the precepts of Him who "desireth truth in the inward parts," and yet profess to trust in him for success! Look for God's blessing on the violation of God's will! *That* were

infatuation indeed! How could David trust in God for the success of his plan against Uriah the Hittite—a plan to accomplish adultery by murder? There was art in it; but there was not *wisdom*. The art was the art of hell; and success left a barb rankling in the soul.

Verse 21. "The wise in heart shall be called prudent; and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning." Some translators invert the first part of the verse—"The prudent shall be called wise in heart." There is no need for any such change. "*The wise in heart*" are those who, under the influence of sound principles, know how to "order their affairs with discretion." Men of the most splendid powers and attainments are not always the most remarkable for practical good sense. Better, therefore, in many respects, is the man whose wisdom regulates his temper and affections, his words and actions, aright. *That* is far more important, for the production of personal and social happiness, than the most brilliant genius without it.—He "*shall be called prudent*," means his having a character for it—his being looked up to, respected, consulted, confided in, chosen as an adviser. Such a man is more truly valuable and useful, than the man of *mere learning*, who has not discretion and common sense to guide the use of it. We see the effect of the manifestation of "wisdom of heart" in procuring reputation and inspiring confidence, in the case of Solomon in his first recorded act of judgment—1 Kings iii. 28.

It is, at the same time, of great moment, that along with the possession of wisdom and prudence, there be "*the sweetness of the lips*"—or *honeyed* lips—gentleness and persuasiveness of counsel—impressive eloquence of speech: which gives vast advantage in the application of wisdom for the benefit of others. It "*increaseth learning*"—effectually spreading it—rendering others wise as well as the possessor himself.

If the "wise in heart" be understood of the truly, spiritually, divinely wise, then the phrase "*shall be called prudent*" must be interpreted, according to a common Hebrew idiom, as meaning "*is prudent*"—*deserves* to be so called. The sentiment will thus be the oft-repeated one, *that true religion*

is the only genuine prudence. And is it not so? we ask anew. Take as a standard the ordinary maxims of prudence among men. Is it the part of prudence to be considerate? to look forward? to anticipate, as far as possible, the contingencies of the future? to provide against evil? to make sure of lasting good? Then is true religion the very perfection of prudence. It secures the happiness of both worlds; the most substantial enjoyment in this, and eternal life in the next. These ordinary maxims of prudence would more than justify no small sacrifices in the present life—nay even the endurance of continued privation and suffering during the entire course of it,—were the result to be, insuring the blessedness of a never-ending existence. It is capable of more than demonstration—it is intuitively manifest—that if life were prolonged to an antediluvian continuance, it would be the part of wisdom cheerfully to submit to have Methuselah's nine hundred and sixty-nine years filled up every moment with the most intense and varied of torments, were these to secure the happiness of *eternity*—of which nine hundred and sixty-nine times that period does not so much as form a part! It would, beyond all controversy, be a bargain of *prudence*. But, blessed be God! there is no call to any such purchase. "Godliness has promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come." The ways of true religion are even here "ways of pleasantness and peace."

Verse 22. "Understanding is a well-spring of life unto him that hath it: but the instruction of fools is folly."* "*Understanding*" must here be taken in its highest acceptance, as synonymous with spiritual illumination—the divinely imparted discernment of the truth and excellence of divine discoveries. For, although even the ordinary exercise of intellect, in the acquisition and use of general knowledge, is, without doubt, a source of real enjoyment, and may, in an inferior sense, be called a "*well-spring of life*"—one of the fountains from which the happiness of life is drawn; yet the expression, as it occurs in Scripture, means something

* Compare chap. xiii. 16: and chap. xiv. 27.

more—even a spring from which life itself is obtained—a *life-giving spring*; and the life that is yielded is the happy life that lies in God's favour. The spiritual understanding of divine truth is "a well-spring of life" to the person himself who possesses it,—and it is a fountain from which streams of life-giving influence flow forth to others. Let me refer you to two passages for illustration. Our Lord says—"This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."* The words express *two* things,—*first*, that the *thing known* is the *ground* of eternal life; and *secondly*, that the *knowledge of it* is the *principle* of eternal life. He who, by the illumination of the Spirit, possesses this knowledge, has, in his mind and heart, the essential element of the life—the germ from which it springs—its "incorruptible seed." Jesus further says, "Who-soever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but who-soever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."† It matters little whether the water that Christ gives be interpreted of the water of divine instruction, or of the Holy Spirit's influence; for the two are inseparable. It is the Spirit imparting divine knowledge,—or it is divine knowledge imparted by the Spirit,—that becomes, in him who enjoys it, this "well of water"—"the water of life."

And, as I have remarked, it sends forth streams for the benefit of others;—becomes not only a living but a *life-giving* fountain. Thus Jesus says of the Spirit—"He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."‡ The instructions of the spiritually enlightened man are *life-giving* instructions.

"*But the instruction of fools is folly.*" These words are capable of *two* senses. 1. They may mean that the instruction imparted to fools is *like themselves*:—what can come out of a fool but folly? 2. They may mean that the in-

* John xvii. 3.

† John iv. 13, 14.

‡ See John vii. 37—39.

struction imparted *to* fools is *labour lost*,—the attempt to teach them, *folly*. From the antithesis in the verse, the former seems the more likely sense. What comes from the mouth must correspond with what is within:—and this is true, both as to temporal and as to spiritual things.

The *next* verse proceeds on the same general principle, and may serve for the further illustration of this—"The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips."

1. That which the wise man utters is *in itself* good—instructive, edifying, "profitable to direct." The streams bear analogy to the fountain.

2. The wise man uses the understanding, the wisdom and knowledge, imparted to him, for the benefit of others. The wisdom that is in his heart passes to his lips. All that he knows, he seeks to turn to use, as "a good steward of the manifold grace of God."

3. His self-knowledge—his experience of his own heart—his incessant self-inspection—his intimate acquaintance with the secret tendencies and workings of his own mind, in the various scenes and circumstances of life—his knowledge both of "the old man" and of "the new man" in their respective principles and influences, as they exist and contend within himself—all qualify him for wisely and judiciously counselling others, according to their characters and situations:—for "as in water face answereth to face; so the heart of man to man." There may be, there *are*, many varieties of peculiar character; but the great general features both of *corruption* and of *grace* are the same in all; and an intimate experimental acquaintance with them in their diversified and conflicting operations in the soul, is a most important qualification of a spiritual teacher and counsellor—rendering him at once *discerning* and *humble*; the discernment dictating the appropriate counsel, and the humility imparting to it its appropriate tone. Which leads me to notice—

4. The truly wise man will, in his wisdom, accommodate the *manner* of his instructions and counsels to the varying characters and tempers of his fellow-men. A vast deal depends on this. The end is often lost, not for want of wis-

dom in the lesson itself, but for lack of discretion in the *mode* of imparting it.

A thorough knowledge of anatomy is necessary to a judicious and successful practice in the operations of surgery. Ere he venture to make his incision, the surgeon ought to understand all about the region where it is to be made,—what arteries, veins, glands, nerves, lie in the way of his instrument;—and should be fully aware of the peculiarities of the case under his treatment. In like manner an intimate acquaintance with the *anatomy of the heart* is necessary to discriminative and successful dealing with *moral cases*—to the suitable communication of instruction and advice. Without the surgical knowledge mentioned, a practitioner may inflict a worse evil than the one he means to cure. And so, through ignorance of *moral anatomy*, may the injudicious adviser,—who treats all cases alike, and makes no account of the peculiarities of character and situation with which he has to do.

Verse 24. “Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.”—*Honey* was prized by those of old time, not only as a luxury to the palate, but on account of its medicinal and salutary properties. To this there is an allusion here. The words express the twofold idea of *pleasantness* and of *benefit*. Many things have the one quality, which have not the other. Many a poison is like honey, sweet to the taste; but, instead of being “*health to the bones*,” is laden with *death*. So may it be in regard to their present effect and their ultimate influence, with *words*.

Harshness and severity never afford pleasure, and seldom yield profit. If they were, in any case, requisite to the latter, we should be under the necessity of giving it the preference, for profit must ever take precedence of mere pleasure. But it will usually be found that *both* are united. *Pleasant words*, however, must be distinguished from *flattering words*. The latter may at the time be palatable, but they can never be otherwise than injurious; for they are not words of *truth*.

“Pleasant words” may be understood of words of soothing sympathy and comfort in the season of trouble. These

are indeed "sweet to the soul" of the disconsolate mourner; and they are strength to all the principles of rectitude within him. For in regard to consolation, as in regard to everything else, the pleasant words must be true words. If not, the consolation cannot be true consolation, and will prove bitterness in the latter end.

"Pleasant words" again may be understood of the gentle though firm language of needful and salutary reproof. Such reproof must be administered in faithfulness and love; as little in the terms of angry severity as affectionate fidelity will allow. "A soft tongue breaketh the bone." Faithfulness may be maintained in perfect harmony with gentleness. He is in a mighty mistake, who fancies he cannot be faithful otherwise than by being high, and violent, and dictatorial. There are varieties of temper, no doubt, to be dealt with; but, in general, one word of manifestly sincere affection will go further towards our object—"the gaining of our brother,"—than a hundred of intemperate invective. If we have a bitter or otherwise disagreeable medicine to administer, we are desirous, in proportion to its own nauseousness, to convey it in a pleasant *vehicle*. Thus should we do with reproof. It is itself bitter—in some cases most unpalatable. Let it be administered in honey—the honey of "pleasant words." It will thus be the better taken; and indeed in this case—in the case of moral distemper and moral influence—the sweetness of the accents will contribute to the efficacy of the medicine of reproof that is conveyed in them. The more distasteful we know any advice to be, while we know it at the same time to be salutary, the more reason is there for the words in which it is communicated to be "pleasant words."—In the case of the body, we must not sacrifice the *health* to the mere gratification of the *palate*; but, on the other hand, it would be untender and harsh, to make the potion on purpose bitter and nauseous, when the health does not at all require our doing so, but would be equally the better for it, if taken in a pleasant as if taken in an unpleasant vehicle,—in honey as in gall.

The same observation may be applied to all *controversy*.

If our object be to convince and to reclaim,—to disabuse the mind of error and to recommend truth,—we do what lies in our power to frustrate that object when we make use of irritating words,—words of contempt and of anger,—words of personality and violence. The maxim ought ever to be—“*Soft words and hard arguments.*” Soft words are not weak and tame words. In proportion to the importance and certainty of our position must our words be decided and strong. But they may be both, and yet words of love; both as to our *subject*, while they are gentle and pleasant to our adversary’s *person*. The two should ever be kept distinct. And the more important our subject, and the more solicitous we are to make a favourable impression in regard to our view of it, the more solicitous should we be to shun all that might prove repulsive and provoking.

For the illustration of the *twenty-fifth* verse the reader is referred to chap. xiv. 12, where the same sentiment occurs.

Verse 26. “He that laboureth, laboureth for himself; for his mouth craveth it of him.”—A rendering considerably different, and conveying quite a different sentiment, has by some critics been given of this verse; and the sense in which they understand it is supported by the authority of the Septuagint:—“The troublesome person troubleth himself; for his mouth turneth upon him.” The sentiment thus extracted from the words is one of which the truth is many a time realized; namely, that the evil which the troublesome man utters, and by which he vexes, disquiets, and injures others, shall ultimately return in damage to himself. It does so *amongst men*, by his becoming the object of universal suspicion, distrust, and resentment—hated and shunned; and in his misfortunes unpitied. And *from God* he receives his due recompense. He makes his evil dispositions his tormentors and punishers; causes his words to betray and injure himself; and in the end requites him according to his ill-deserts.

While this is a truth, I am inclined to regard it as somewhat a forced and unnatural interpretation of the original words, and our own received translation as simpler and preferable:

“He that laboureth, laboureth for himself; for his mouth craveth it of him”—or *presseth on him*—or *urgeth it on him*.* The sentiment is, that *hunger is the incentive to labour*. Man must have sustenance, and to obtain it he must work. He who will not work must starve. In “the sweat of his face” must man eat his bread. In civilized life, no doubt, there are many artificial wants. Various luxuries are desired, in addition to the means of subsistence and even the comforts of life. But the original, the primary and proper impulse to labour is, the necessity and the “craving” for food. This is *first*. Other things are superinduced upon it.†

Let not the sentiment before us, however, be misinterpreted and abused, as if it savoured of selfishness, or was meant to give it any countenance. It does not mean that the labour of man ought to be, or even that it may lawfully be, solely for himself—for *his own mouth alone*. There are other and ulterior objects of labour. There is nothing selfish in the pervading spirit, or in any one precept, of the word of God. A noble and exalted motive to labour is laid down by the Apostle Paul—“Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, *that he may have to give to him that needeth*,” Eph. iv. 28. There is thus infused into the toils even of the humblest sphere the principle and spirit of benevolence. A man must, in the first instance, labour for himself and for his family:—his own mouth and theirs “crave it of him.” But when he has a little—how little soever—to spare, he is to indulge the sympathies of his heart for others, who may be still worse off than himself. And let it not by any be forgotten,—especially in these times of hardship,—how distressing it is, when a man is *disposed* to labour, and, with all his anxiety and pains, cannot find work to do! Such industrious poor ought to be pitied and relieved; and everything done that can be done, to open for

* “*The appetite of him who toils, is toilsome to him, (i. e. makes him strenuously exert himself) for his mouth urgeth him on (i. e. for appetite is urgent).*”—*Stuart*.

† Eccl. vi. 7.

them permanent sources of employment and comfort, both by individuals and by the government of the country.

Alas! that the *craving of the mouth* for “the meat that perisheth” should be so universal, and should keep the whole world ever astir, while there is so little desire after “the meat which endureth unto everlasting life!” Alas, that there should be so little labouring for *it*—for “the bread that came down from heaven to give life unto the world!”—that the prayer of felt necessity and earnest desire should come from so few lips—“Lord, evermore give us that bread!” *Why* is it so? Simply because the wants of the body are *felt*, and not those of the soul; the necessity of providing for the present life, and not that of providing for the life to come. O that men were wise! that they would attend to the gracious and faithful admonition and counsel of the “Friend of sinners”—“Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you!” Mark well his solemn words—“I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.” *Labouring* implies some impression of the value of that for which we make the exertion. O the preciousness of life eternal!—and consequently of the means of obtaining it—the “living bread—the bread of life!” There is no labour that would be too much for this. But it is offered to sinners as God’s *free gift*, “without money and without price.” When a sinner, however, has believed the gospel,—has felt his destitution and his need,—and the value of the life which the gospel reveals, what toil, what self-denial, what sacrifices, will he not submit to, with cheerfulness, for its final and full attainment!*

In conclusion—I. If it be *a truth* that “happy is he who trusteth in the Lord,” then “lie not against the truth,” by

* Compare 2 Cor. v. 9: Phil. iii. 8—10.

professing to trust, and yet showing none of the peace and joy which such trust should inspire. If you betray the same anxiety and carefulness, the same trepidation, the same fretful disquietude in disappointment, which are shown by the men of the world,—well may they ask, Where is your religion?—and throw the further question in your teeth, “What do ye more than others?” O manifest its happy tendency; doing your duty with active cheerfulness,—blessing God if you succeed, and bowing, and still blessing Him if you fail.

2. Study to ascertain your respective talents,—and without “thinking of yourselves more highly than you ought to think, but thinking soberly,” *use* them for the glory of your Master, and for the benefit of your fellow-men. Knowledge of business and of the world; knowledge of divine truth and of the things of God;—wisdom and experience in the affairs of life, or in spiritual concerns;—the power of speech and persuasive address;—all descriptions of authority and influence,—whatever it be by the *use* of which you may be useful, employ it with this view;—whether it be in instructing the ignorant, in counselling the heedless, in establishing the unsettled, in comforting the cast down, in directing the perplexed, in pleading the cause of the injured, in warning and strengthening the tempted, in reclaiming the wandering, in cheering the pilgrims on their way to Zion.

3. We have been speaking of the importance of accommodating instruction and counsel to character and situation: there is *one* character and *one* situation that is common to ALL—all differing, yet all alike. *Sinner* is the general character of mankind, without one exception; *guilty and lost* their universal condition. And for this common character and common condition, there is a common counsel—and there is *but one*:—“BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THOU SHALT BE SAVED.”

LECTURE XLIV.

PROV. XVI. 27—33.

“An ungodly man diggeth up evil; and in his lips there is as a burning fire. A froward man soweth strife; and a whisperer separateth chief friends. A violent man enticeth his neighbour, and leadeth him into the way that is not good. He shutteth his eyes to devise froward things; moving his lips he bringeth evil to pass. The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness. He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city. The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.”

In the first of these verses, “*an ungodly man*” is, in the original, “*A son of Belial*;”—a frequent designation of the wicked—of those who “have no fear of God before their eyes.” In the expression “*diggeth up evil*” two ideas may be included:—

1. *Taking pains to devise it.* We dig and search for treasure in a mine, or where we fancy it lies concealed: thus the wicked man, the “son of Belial,” does in regard to “*evil*.” It is his treasure—that on which he sets his heart; and for it, as for treasure, he “digs” and searches,—ay, often deep and long. His very happiness seems to depend on his reaching and finding it. He is specially laborious and persevering, when any one chances to have become the object of his pique or malice. Marvellous is the assiduity with which he then strains every nerve to produce mischief,—plodding and plotting for it,—mining and undermining,—exploring in every direction, often where no one could think of but himself,—and, with savage delight, exult-

ing in the discovery of aught that can be made available for his diabolical purpose.

2. Taking pains to *revive it*, after it has been buried and forgotten. He goes down into the very graves of old quarrels; brings them up afresh; puts new life into them; wakes up grudges that had long slept; and sets people by the ears again, who had abandoned their enmities, and had for years been living in reconciliation and peace.

As to "*evil*," whether old or new, "the son of Belial" is like one in quest of some mine of coal or of precious metal. He examines his ground; and wherever he discovers any hopeful symptoms on the surface, he proceeds to drill, and bore, and excavate. The slightest probability of success will be enough for his encouragement to toil and harass himself night and day until he can make something of it. The persevering pains of such men would be incredible were they not sadly attested by *facts*:—"They search out iniquities; they accomplish a diligent search: both the inward thought of every one of them, and the heart, is deep."*

The latter part of the verse corresponds well with the former—"And in his lips there is as a burning fire." This is a contrast to the "pleasant words" of the 24th verse. The "burning fire" is the fire of pride, of passion, or of lust:—perhaps, from the immediate connexion, *words* such as serve for kindling the flames of contention and discord, whether in families, or in the circles of intimacy and friendship, to which his malignant influence finds access. The heart burns with envy and malice; and the words of the lips get their fire from within; both, in the strong terms of the Apostle James, being "*set on fire of hell*."—The three following verses continue the description of these "sons of Belial."†

Verse 28. "A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends." They try, wherever they can find any even the smallest room for them, to insert the seeds

* Comp. Psal. lxiv. 1—6.

† They bear a close resemblance, in the spirit of the character they describe, to previous passages—chap. i. 10—14; ii. 10—15; vi. 12—14.

of animosity; and, with a devilish interest, they watch their secret germination and their gradual growth. They suit their practice to the particular case:—more open and direct in the means they use in one case; more covert and cunning in another.

“*Whispering*” is one of their favourite resources. This whispering is carried on with both parties,—while each is kept in careful ignorance of what is said of him to the other. Insinuations, intended to engender suspicion and jealousy, are thrown out to the one and to the other respecting his friend. Mutual coolness ensues, and neither can understand why; each wonders what can possibly be the cause. And thus the firmest, the longest, the warmest, and most confiding attachments—the sources of life’s sweetest joys—are broken up, perhaps for ever.

These sons of Belial are also *tempters of others*:—Verse 29. “A violent man enticeth his neighbour, and leadeth him into the way that is not good.”

A fearful employment—a fearful delight! Yet the employment would not be followed, were there not pleasure in it. The pleasure is fiendish—laying plans, and putting every vile art into practice, to seduce the virtuous—and especially virtuous and unsuspecting youth—from the way of rectitude! Not the young only entice one another; but men of gray hairs,—the veterans of infidelity and vice, may be found weaving their nets for the feet of virtue, and spreading them with all subtlety and care. There is not on earth a more perfect impersonation of Satanic malignity than such a hoary-headed seducer.

As “there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth,” so is there a malicious *joy in hell* when such tempters succeed in turning any from the right to the wrong, from the narrow to the broad, way. This is the joy of fiends; the other of angels: the one the joy of Satan; the other of Jesus and of God.

The character is completed in verse 30—“He shutteth his eyes to devise froward things: moving his lips he bringeth evil to pass.”

A man "*shuts his eyes*," when he wishes to think closely and undistractedly. "The ungodly man" does it for the purpose of planning and maturing "mischievous devices." When he "*shuts his eyes*" even in bed, while others sleep, it is to meditate on schemes of evil. And then, having digested his schemes inwardly, he employs his "*lips*" in their artful accomplishment. Thus *mind* and *mouth* are in concert for evil—the latter the agent and servant of the former.*

The connexion of *suggestion* is abundantly manifest between the description in these verses and the verse which follows: "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." The little word *if* is a supplement. The verse may be read without it. "The hoary head is a crown of glory; *it shall be* found in the way of righteousness." Two things are implied:—the conduciveness of righteousness to *the attainment of old age*, and its conduciveness to the *respectability and honour of old age*. The *former* sentiment we have noticed, under other forms, before: it expresses rather a *natural tendency* than anything like an *invariable fact*.† The *latter* is the same with that expressed when the *if* is retained.

Respect and honour, as due to age, are enjoined by the Mosaic law: "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am Jehovah," Lev. xix. 32. As there is a respect due to *office* independently of character, so is there to *old age*—to gray hairs. But as, in the former case, our very veneration for the office makes us the more indignantly sensible of its desecration, by the intrusion and occupancy of characters whose incongruity with it is marked and notorious, so is it with our feelings as to *age*. The more we venerate "the hoary head," the more are we shocked by its association with meanness and vileness of character,—with impiety and vice. A *wicked old man*—a man silvered with age—who has come to the "threescore years and ten," or even the "fourscore years," but on whom

* Comp. Psal. xxxvi. 1—4.

† See chap. iii. 1, 2; ix. 10, 11.

long and varied experience,—warnings and entreaties, blessings and corrections, kindness and severity, promises to allure and threatenings to alarm, the smiles of a gracious and the frowns of an angry God, the terrors of the law and the mercies of the gospel, have all been equally thrown away;—whose advancing years have only ripened him in profanity and sin,—who has become only more and more “wise to do evil,” “but to do good” continues to have “no knowledge,” and who, while “even to hoar hairs” providential goodness has spared him, has still “no fear of God before his eyes:”—shall I say of such a man he is a *contemptible* character? I *might* say it with truth. “Shame and everlasting contempt” are before him as his portion. Yet *scorn* is too light a feeling for the case. He is a character on which we do not so much look with contempt, as with loathing and with pity. We shrink back from the hoary profligate with a shudder. Venerable in appearance, he is in reality odious. The aspect and the character are at variance. We are struck with admiration, when we only see what he *looks*:—we are disappointed and overwhelmed with horror, when we know what he *is*. There is no glory; nothing to admire. “The hoary head” becomes a crown of shame. In proportion to the grace and dignity, it may be, of the outward appearance, by which our eye is captivated and our favour bespoke, is the emotion of disgust, detestation, and grief, with which we hear the disclosures of the character. It is the most affecting sight on earth. We cannot smile; we can hardly scorn. We abhor, and we compassionate—abhor the *character*—compassionate the *man*.

On the contrary—“*the crown of glory is found in the way of righteousness.*” With what peculiar heartfelt delight do we regard the *good* old man, who during a long pilgrimage has “walked with God;” whom length of days has matured in wisdom and in all the lovely virtues of the Christian character; who by the exercise of all the kindred affections, and by the habitual practice of all that is “true, and just, and pure, and honest, and lovely, and of good report,” under the dominant influence of the spring of all—piety to—

wards God,—has recommended himself to the reverence and love of a grateful and admiring community, at the same time that he has endeared himself to the entire circle of his family and kindred!—how we cling to him!—how we esteem and honour him! He has the complacent and affectionate veneration of all the good;—and in the consciences of an ungodly world he has a testimony they cannot set aside. They are constrained to approve and to admire; even while their hearts retain their unhappy disinclination to imitate,—their infatuated attachment to the world and to sin.

Look at old Jacob, the devout patriarch of “a hundred and seven and thirty years,” before the monarch of Egypt. Look at Abraham bowing himself to the children of Heth, while the hearts of all around him bowed in affectionate veneration to himself! Look at the aged Simeon, with the infant Redeemer in his arms; with earth under his feet and heaven in his eye; and with the glory of God, and the salvation of the world, Jew and Gentile, in his devout and benevolent heart! And look at others,—many, both men and women, in Old and New Testament times, to whom age has been honour,—“the hoary head, the crown of glory, being found in the way of righteousness.”

Ye *aged* pilgrims, mark this. Ye have been kept by the grace of God to advanced years in the faith and holiness of his people, beware of whatever would sully your “crown of glory.” See to it, that to the end you keep in “the way of righteousness.” It is when the life has been passed in that way, and a consistent character has throughout been maintained, that the glory of this crown is the greatest. But even to those who have spent a long lifetime without God, in the ways of sin and the world, we have the full warrant of God’s word for saying, *It is not yet too late*. “While the lamp holds on to burn,” the *oldest* as well as “the *vilest* sinner”—ay, though he be the oldest and the vilest in one—“may return.” It is not too late for you even now, to cover your hoar hairs with “the honour that cometh from God.” God will honour all, of whatever age—and the saints of God will honour them, and the angels of God will honour them, and

rejoice over them too,—who turn unto Him, by Jesus Christ, as penitent and believing suppliants for mercy, confessing and forsaking their sins, and avowing and practising the determination “no longer to live the rest of their time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.”

And let the *young* mark this. You wish to live to old age; and you wish, in old age, to have respect and honour. Behold the way. O follow those aged pilgrims who are now wearing “the crown of glory.” They have found it in “the way of righteousness;” and that way you must pursue, if *you* would ever wear it. And the earlier you enter on it, and the more steadfastly and consistently you keep it, the more lovely and the more venerable will be your crown. Let all, in youth, in manhood, or in age, remember the words of Jesus—“If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, *him* will my Father honour,” John xii. 26. And *then*—even if men should “cast out your name as evil,” blessed are ye!—blessed now—blessed for ever! The “crown of glory” shall be yours, “that fadeth not away.”

“*The mighty*”—the conquering heroes and warriors of successive ages, have ever stood high in honour and fame amongst mankind. To such has been attached the appellative surname of *the great*. They have been celebrated in history and in song. Their names have become the watch-words of excitement to deeds of valorous achievement, and have been enrolled in the archives of a nation’s glory. But according to the wise man, speaking by the Spirit of God, the best of all conquests is the conquest of one’s self; and self-command the most truly excellent and desirable of all supremacy:—“He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.”* (v. 32.)—In the *first* place, he accomplishes a *more difficult* task. To indulge passion is easy; because it is natural,—all being, according to the tendencies of *fallen* nature, prone to it. The poet expresses the sentiment and feeling

* Comp. chap. xiv. 28; xv. 18.

of that nature, when he says—"But oh! revenge is sweet!" To follow, therefore, the bent and tendency of our nature, requires no struggle, and, being common to all, involves no distinction. But to keep the passions in check,—to bridle and to deny them; instead of letting loose our rage against an enemy, to subdue him by kindness,—“when he hungers to feed him, when he thirsts to give him drink;”—this is one of the severest efforts of virtuous or of gracious principle. The most contemptible fool on earth may send a challenge, and draw a trigger; and, indeed, his readiness to do so will be in proportion to his imbecility of mind,—the *littleness* of self-importance. It requires no great amount of brains to quarrel and fight. But to lay passion under restraint,—to keep down the risings of pride,—not to be “overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good,”—demands a vigour of mind, and decision of character, far more difficult of acquisition than the thoughtless courage that can stand the fire of an adversary.—Then *further*, he does a greatly *better* and *more useful* thing. Universal self-government—universal command of temper,—would surely make an incomparably happier world, than universal pride, universal resentment, universal courage, and universal strength!

How widely different the maxims prevalent in the world and those sanctioned by the Word of God! According to the latter he is the truly great man,—not who destroys and lays waste cities, and desolates kingdoms, and wades through fields of bloody carnage to the utmost point of his ambitious aspiring; but who succeeds in subjugating his passions; who, by meekness and gentleness, diffuses peace and happiness around him; who “loves his enemies, does good to them that hate him, and prays for them who spitefully use him and persecute him,” thus imitating the universal Father, who “makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” In reference to one of the warriors, or wholesale murderers and robbers of ancient days, who obtained the title of “THE GREAT,” it has been truly and happily said, “*To subdue one's self is more*

than to conquer the world; for he who conquered the world could not subdue himself."

Let us aim then at *this* mastery,—the mastery of the passions, the government of SELF; and, in order to its attainment, keep in mind at once the need of divine grace, and the *sufficiency* of it for every one;—the need of it, that we may not fail through *self*-sufficiency, and the sufficiency of it, that we may not find an apology in the strength of our passions and the quickness and excitability of our natural temperament, for our failing to gain the ascendancy. There are no passions so strong—no temperaments so excitable,—as to be beyond the power of divine grace to overcome; and that grace is promised, in unqualified terms,—and, therefore, in *every case*,—to the full extent in which it can be required, to all who *ask* it.—At the same time, let those of more phlegmatic temperament, and less violent passions than others, guard against two things,—mistaking in themselves the mere gentleness of constitutional temper for the operation of God's Spirit; and being uncharitably severe on those whose temperament may be the opposite of their own, and, instead of having been restrained and subdued by early training, may have been only further cherished in its touchiness and fiery violence, by education and circumstances; and who may have actually overcome in themselves more than *they* have, although much remains to be subdued.

Verse 33. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord."

The lot is anything, whether *drawn* or *cast*, for the purpose of determining any matter in question. The instances of its use mentioned in Scripture are considerably various:—

1. In finding out a guilty person when there was no direct and satisfactory evidence: (1 Sam. xiv. 38—42; Jonah i. 7).

2. In dividing and apportioning land: (Num. xxvi. 52—56.)

3. In the choice of an official functionary: (Acts i. 26.)

4. In assigning departments of duty: (1 Chron. xxiv. 4, 5; xxv. 8.)

5. In deciding controversies: (Prov. xviii. 18; Psal. xxii. 18. with John xix. 23, 24.)

There are no particular *laws*, either enjoining or prohibiting the use of the lot;—specifying any occasions on which it must or must not be employed. The direction to use it, however, on certain special occasions, gave it a divine sanction. At the same time, from the fact of God's commanding a particular mode of proceeding in a particular case, it would be rather a presumptuous and hazardous thing for any one to take upon him to determine in what other cases recourse may be had to the same practice. Even such texts as the one before us, are capable of being interpreted without inferring a certain divine approval of the frequent or ordinary appeal to this mode of decision:—inasmuch as, whether the “casting of the lot into the lap” was of divine authority or not, it would be equally true that “the disposing thereof was of the Lord.” It is very plain, that when it was had recourse to by Jews or Christians, it involved an appeal to the omniscient God. And one general principle regarding the employment of it is sufficiently manifest,—namely, that it should never be introduced except in cases *where reason and evidence are incompetent to decide*. And we may, I think, safely go so far as to affirm, that in cases of importance and of extremity,—that is, where other means of arriving at a satisfactory conclusion or a harmonious agreement have failed,—there does not appear to be anything in the Scriptures by which such an appeal can be considered as interdicted. There does not appear to be anything in it at all repugnant to the general character, or to any of the principles or provisions of evangelical or New Testament worship. Still, if there is nothing *interdictory* of the use of it, there is nothing that makes it *obligatory* in any specified circumstances; and it is clear that, if used at all, it should be seriously and sparingly.

It is very wrong, and the very reverse of truth, to speak of any matter whatever as being in this way referred to *chance*. There *is* no such thing. Chance is nothing—an absolute non-entity. It is a mere term for expressing *our ignorance*. Every turn of the dice in the box is regulated

by certain physical laws; so that *if we knew* all the turns, we would infallibly tell what number would cast up. And so it is in every thing.—Besides, in no case is there a more thorough disavowal of chance than in the use of *the lot*. It is the strongest and most direct recognition that can be made of a particular providence,—of the constant and minute superintendence of an omniscient overruling Mind. While it assumes our own ignorance, it equally assumes divine knowledge.—“*The whole disposing,*” or *determining*, “*of it is of the Lord:*”—or, as some understand it, “*the entire judicial decision by it is of the Lord.*” Whatever be the kind of lot employed, all is under His control, who has every law of nature, and every movement, whether of the hand or mind of man, under perfect and unceasing control. This is, or ought to be, the acknowledgment of the parties in every instance of recourse to this mode of settlement.

The section of the Christian community among whom the use of *the lot* is most frequently resorted to is—the Moravians or United Brethren; among whom, indeed, the use of it is held as one of their distinguishing principles. It is employed in the selection of their bishops, according to the example of the choice of an apostle in the room of Judas, in the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles;—as well as on various other occasions.

By many pious persons the condemnation of all games that pass under the designation of *games of chance* has been rested on this text and others of the same description. I cannot but think, *injudiciously*. It is pushing the application of the principle of such texts to an extreme; and placing the objection to such games on a ground which, with many, can never prove convincing or satisfactory. The objection should not, I humbly conceive, be rested solely or chiefly on the consideration of these games being *chance* games. I have already said that there is no such thing as chance; and, when no such thing as an appeal to providence is at all thought of by the mind of the player, there is no more of impiety in this case than in others without number, where there is nothing bearing even the name of

chance, yet in which providence is not thought of. And when it is alleged that the lot has been rendered sacred by the use of it on sacred occasions, the objection does not seem to have force in it; inasmuch as it would lead to our drinking no water, and to our relinquishing the use of bread and of wine, because *they* too are all made use of in sacred institutions. I cannot help thinking that the objection against such games is more satisfactorily derived from their *evil tendencies when indulged in*, than from any mere *abstract principle* such as the one just mentioned. They involve a temptation to waste precious time; they tend to unsettle and unduly excite the mind; they are fitted to engender a liking to gambling; they serve, in many cases, especially when stakes are introduced, to foment the worst passions. Yet even here discretion is required; for some of these evil tendencies attach equally to other pursuits which few think of sweeping within a verdict of universal and unqualified condemnation. We may safely say that, in the amusements of youth, the less of such games the better; and that in all cases they require to be under very judicious regulation and control.

In some instances, they have become, from particular associations, no matter how, *marks of a worldly character*. In such cases, Christians will feel it their imperative duty to shun them. They will be shunned too, in cases where the introduction of them would give offence—I do not say to weak minds, because they are by no means all weak minds that object to them—but to *scrupulous* minds, that cannot see things in the same light with ourselves. And in one case more they ought to be shunned—when from our at all, however moderately, practising them, others are likely to plead our example in excuse for themselves, in going a length far beyond what we should regard as legitimate. This is not seldom the use made by worldly men of the example of Christians; and it should render Christians specially careful of the example they set.

Allow me to illustrate and confirm this last remark by an instance. It is taken from the Life of the celebrated com-

mentator THOMAS SCOTT. Before the happy change in his views of divine truth, he himself informs us, he was particularly fond of *cards*. And although afterwards he had lost all his relish for them and other things of a like nature, he adds:—"I however occasionally joined in a game, from an idea that too great preciseness might prejudice my neighbours; and I was then of opinion that there was no harm in the practice, though it seemed a frivolous way of spending time. I *felt* it also a very awkward transition to remove the card table and introduce the Bible and family worship; though I never omitted this service at home, and commonly performed it on my visits. My fetters were, however, broken effectually and at once, in the following manner. Being on a visit to one of my parishioners, I walked out after dinner, as was my common practice, to visit some of my poor people, when one of them (the first person, so far as I know, to whom my ministry had been decidedly useful) said to me—"I have something which I wish to say to you; but I am afraid you may be offended." "I answered that I could not promise, but I hoped I should not." She then said—"You know A. B.; he has lately appeared attentive to religion; and has spoken to me concerning the sacrament:—but last night, he, with C. D. and some others, met to keep Christmas; and they played at cards, drank too much, and in the end quarrelled, and raised a sort of riot. And when I remonstrated with him on his conduct, as inconsistent with his professed attention to religion, his answer was—"There is no harm in cards; Mr. Scott plays at cards.'" This smote me to the heart. I saw that if I played at cards, however soberly and quietly, the people would be encouraged by my example to go further. That very evening," he adds, "I related the whole matter to the company, and declared my fixed resolution, never to play at cards again. I expected that I should be harassed with solicitations; but I was never asked to play afterwards. Let me therefore from my own experience, as well as from the reason of the case, urge persons, from their first entrance upon a religious course, when asked to do any thing which they disapprove, fairly to

state their disapprobation as a point of conscience. For not only is this most *becoming* those in whom there is no guile, but it is also by far the most *prudent* proceeding.”*

Lay to heart, brethren, this counsel, and, in like circumstances, follow the example of this “man of God.” “Avoid all appearance of evil,” and give no advantage to the enemies of the truth. Act boldly and faithfully for Christ, whose you are, and whom you profess to serve, and you will have an ample reward in peace of mind, and the approving smile of your exalted Lord.

* In the Life of the same eminent Commentator, another instance occurs of a similar kind:—“When I first attended seriously to religion, I used sometimes, when I had a journey to perform on the next day, to ride a stage in the evening, after the services of the Sabbath; and I trust my time on horseback was not spent unprofitably. But I soon found that this furnished an excuse to some of my parishioners, for employing a considerable part of the Lord’s day in journeys of business or convenience. I may scarcely add, that I immediately abandoned the practice, on the same ground on which I resolved never more to play at cards, even before I thought so unfavourably of them as I now do.”

LECTURE XLV.

PROV. XVII. 1—7.

“Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife. A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren. The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the Lord trieth the hearts. A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips; and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue. Who-so mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker; and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished. Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers. Excellent speech becometh not a fool; much less do lying lips a prince.”

THIS chapter, you perceive, commences with a proverb much the same as others that have been already under our notice:—“Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife.” The word “*sacrifices*” has reference to the practice of feasting on the flesh of the slain victims, when they were not holocausts—to be entirely consumed on the altar.† The preposition “*with*” is supplementary. The words have been rendered “sacrifices of strife;” that is, such as, in the appropriation and consumption of them, occasion contention and brawls. On the margin the proper *sense* of the word, in such a connexion, is evidently given—“a house full of *good cheer* with strife.” I do not dwell now on the sentiment—the superiority of the feast of love—the feast of souls, to the banquet of royal dainties, where there is *no heart*. But let all feel its truth. Let the poor especially feel it, when called to par-

* See chap. xv. 16, 17.

† Compare 1 Sam. ix. 12, 13, 22—24.

take of their frugal and necessarily stinted meals. If they sit down to these in the smiling cordiality of domestic love, and with the supplicated blessing of Him who “feeds the ravens” and “clothes the lilies of the field,”—they are happier far than those whose houses are full of *good cheer*; but full, along with it, of the bitterness of contention. Love sweetens the stinted portion; hatred embitters the full one.

Verse 2. “A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren.” The general maxim here is, that wisdom—true godly discretion—the exercise of genuine principle in steady fidelity, prudence, diligence, and general propriety of conduct,—*tends to advancement*—to elevate to higher station, and to secure approbation and reward. A servant whose character has been long tried and proved, will be highly respected and valued, and will obtain the most important trusts. Even the care of a refractory and wayward child may be committed to such a domestic, as one in whose fidelity and prudence the most entire confidence can be reposed. Or the phrase, “*shall have rule over the son who causeth shame*,” may only signify his becoming the superior of such a son and heir, in the amount of his influence and weight in all domestic arrangements. Such a servant is a treasure in the family to which he or she belongs. And in many instances, with great propriety, have such servants found a place among the legatees of their masters;—obtaining, as their reward, and their testimonial of grateful approbation, a portion of the family patrimony. This was the case of old, in a special manner, with servants who had been born and brought up in the family, or on the estate, and had worn out the vigour of their youth and manhood in the faithful service of the one or of the other. Such a servant to the patriarch Abraham was Eliezer of Damascus.

Let me say, then, to servants, that there is hardly any other class in society who have more in their power, in either promoting or preventing domestic comfort and happiness. By faithfulness, industry, good temper, and respectful demeanour,—by putting your hearts into the interests of the

household with which providence has associated you, and identifying yourselves with its well-being, you effect the *former*; you make *yourselves* happy, and you contribute no unimportant share to the happiness of all around you. It is thus too that you render both your station and yourselves respectable and honourable. *It is the man that adorns the station; not the station the man.* The very highest station can never secure respect to the occupant who acts unworthily of it,—who disgraces it. On the contrary, the very contrast between the station and the character will serve to deepen the dark shades of the latter, and aggravate both private and public disrepute. The dutiful servant is incomparably the more honourable and entitled to respect when set in comparison with the mean, the unjust, or the profligate master. No station will detract from you, if *you* adorn the station. And then—while you gain and fix affectionate and grateful regard, and secure from every generous master and mistress an earthly recompense; if you act under the influence of gospel principles, and, in serving your earthly masters, “serve the Lord Christ,” you will enjoy the smile of divine approval, and, in the end, obtain “the reward of the inheritance.”*

Verse 3. “The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the Lord trieth the hearts.”—There are two things effected on the silver and the gold when subjected to the process of the fining-pot, or crucible, and the furnace. These are—*trial* and *purification*; the first with a view to the second. Trial detects the proportion of extraneous matter in the ore,—or of alloy in the metal; and the process which detects, at the same time, and as the designed result, separates the extraneous matter, or the alloy, and by separation, purifies, and so renders the remainder the more precious.

“But the Lord trieth the hearts.” It is obvious that a *comparison* is intended: “*As* the fining-pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; *so* the Lord trieth the hearts.” *Trying* is more than simply *discerning*. The Lord does not need to *try*, in order to make any discovery for himself. He

* See Col. iii. 22—24.

“knoweth what is in man.” But He “tries,” in order to bring to light what may lie concealed from men, and especially from the individual himself. And this He does in order to the person’s conviction and benefit, and that He may be vindicated in his final judgments.

He “tries,” in different respects, both “the wicked and the righteous.” By the dispensations of his providence, He often elicits the latent evils that are in the hearts of the ungodly and the worldly. He brings out their hidden abominations. He manifests the deceitfulness, the hypocrisy, the “desperate wickedness,” of their “inward parts,”—their rebellious and unsubdued dispositions. He exposes the simulation of dissemblers; and of those whose religion only seems to thrive when their profession of it brings no suffering and demands no sacrifice. How many has God thus tried and exhibited in their true characters!—how many has He thus “weighed in the balances, and found wanting!”—In the same manner too does God try, and bring out to view the inward graces and virtues of his children. And, while disclosing, He refines and purifies them, He detects and removes the alloy—the dross and tin of self and the world; separating “the vile” from “the precious,” and so rendering the precious the more excellent;—purging away the earthly from the heavenly, and bringing the heavenly out of the furnace more spiritual and divine.*

Let the Lord’s people, then, in every season of affliction, seek above all things its *refining* virtue. Seek that, when “*tried*,” you may “come forth as gold.” O how sad to suffer, and not to profit! Pray that the gracious end of your heavenly Father may be answered in you; that you may be made more like himself,—more “holy as he is holy,”—more meet for heaven, while sojourning on earth:—that so you may not bear the *heat* of the furnace without acquiring the purity which the heat is meant to impart.

Verse 4. “A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips; and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue.” These words are capable of two meanings. They may mean, first, that the

* See Mal. iii. 3, 4; Zech. xiii. 9; Isa. xxvii. 9; 1 Pet. i. 7.

man is wicked who lends his ear to calumny and slander; who takes up, with easy and malicious credit, all injurious reports: and that *he* is deceitful and not to be trusted, who listens to and encourages the tongue of detraction and envy and inventive malignity,—gathering up evil, and making what he can of it for the stirring up of mischief.—Or rather, secondly, that *the wicked* and *untruthful* are prone to give heed to flattery of themselves, and calumny against others. The more ill they can hear of others, the better. They are supported and comforted by the knowledge that their neighbours are as bad as themselves or worse. They delight in “*false lips*” and in a “*naughty tongue*.” They keep them in countenance. They furnish them with the means of evil, on which they can proceed in their own tales of falsehood and scandal—grafting one lie upon another, and forging all manner of calumnies. It is their highest gratification to get a *good story*, which they can turn to account in their own way.—“A wicked doer,” too, “giveth heed to false lips;” because they are lips of which he can avail himself in time of exigency for his own safety. “A *liar*” is of essential use to the evil-doer. He can suborn him. He can get him to bear witness in his favour—to perjure himself to get him off, when in danger of being convicted.

Such characters too, it may be noticed, are fond of the lies of *false teachers*. They keep their ear greedily open to these. They are soothed and flattered and encouraged by them in their evil courses. They cannot but like the doctrine that allays their fears; that palliates sin; that makes light of future punishment; that tells them of a God all mercy; that assures them of ultimate universal salvation. Thus it was of old; and thus it is still.*

O let thoughtless sinners beware of this wretched delusion! *Lies* may serve a present purpose; they may keep the mind easy for the time:—but their detection must come; and then the emphatic application of the prophet’s question—“What will ye do in the end thereof?” It is strange

* See for example Isa. xxx. 9—11: Jer. v. 31.

how men should wish to be deceived; should be satisfied if they can but keep themselves in present quietness, though at the risk, or with the certainty, of everlasting disappointment, regret, and anguish.

Be assured, my friends, they are not your *enemies* who "tell you the truth." The truth may agitate for the time—may give present pain; but it is salutary; it tends to everlasting benefit. They are not your enemies who warn you that "the wages of sin is death;" when they add with the same breath, that "the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." They are not your enemies who sound in your ears the terrors of a broken law, when they sound along with them the gracious promises of a divinely accredited gospel. They are not your enemies who tell you of the "wrath of God revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men," when they tell you, at the same time, of the love of God revealed to "the chief of sinners" in the cross;—of God's delighting in mercy;—of "God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."

Verse 5. "Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker; and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished." *The poor* are of two descriptions—the industrious and virtuous; the idle and profligate; the one, poor, not by their own misconduct, but in consequence of circumstances over which they could exercise no control; the other, poor through indolence and vice.—*Mockery* is not the sentiment for either. We do, indeed, regard the one and the other with feelings widely dissimilar. In the one case we approve, in the other we condemn; on the one we smile with complacency; on the other we frown with indignation; to the one we cheerfully stretch the hand of our bounty; from the other we hold it back, through a hesitating sense of duty, lest our beneficence should be abused, and bad made worse. We may see it right to allow them to feel the effects of their folly and sin, in order to their future good.

The words before us have manifestly reference to the former—to those whom divine providence has placed in pover-

ty and prevented from rising, or has been pleased, by what we are accustomed to call misfortunes, to reduce to poverty from a better condition. To “*mock*” at such is to “reproach their Maker.” That Maker has assigned them their lot, and to mock *them* is to mock *Him*,—to mock the wisdom and the kindness of his administration. He who is the Maker of the poor is the Maker of the rich,—the Maker and Ruler of the mocker as well as of the object of his scorn. It is a sad thing when one “potsherd of the earth,” because it happens to have got from the hand of the potter a little gilding and superficial decoration, mocks at another “potsherd of the earth” which chances to be somewhat more homely in its outward appearance, or perhaps formed of a little coarser material, than the other; both the work of the same hands, and both alike frail, brittle, and perishable.

It is one of the features of the divine greatness to regard the poor; and one of the features of human littleness to despise them. O what are all the distinctions of earthly condition in His eyes, who is “the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity!” That “high and lofty One” regards the man of low degree who “trembleth at his word,” while the proud scorner of the poor he “knoweth afar off.”—Vast is the multitude of poor amongst us at this moment. O let there be anything but “mockery”—anything but making light of their lamentable privations and sufferings! May God keep all, whether in private or public station, from thus reproaching their Maker, and provoking his wrath!*

Verse 6. “Children’s children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers.” We have had *one* crown of old age before.† Here we have *another*. A numerous progeny was, among the Hebrews, an object of high estimation and earnest desire. In the Scriptures, we find the number of a man’s children frequently specified:—and at times it is represented as a token of divine favour and blessing.‡ As an example of one who enjoyed this crown, look at Joseph.§ When we read the narrative of him, as

* See on chap. xiv. 20, 21, 31.

† Chap. xvi. 31.

‡ See Psalm cxxviii. 6.

§ See Gen. i. 23.

the envied and persecuted stripling of seventeen, we feel towards him a warm and sympathising affection. But when we have followed him through all the intensely interesting steps of his history, and come to the touching close, we feel our affection for Joseph the youth, rise and ripen into veneration for Joseph the aged—the hoary patriarch—in the midst of his descendants of four generations. All these look up to him, with deep reverential love, and honour him for his years, his character, and his paternal authority. They thus invest him with a respectability and dignity which, as a solitary individual, he could not have possessed.

But this is not all that is intended. The meaning and truth of the saying depend greatly on the *character* of the children. It expresses what they *ought to be*.

This, then, implies the duty of parents, on the one hand, so to attend—diligently, affectionately, prayerfully, perseveringly, and with all the accompanying power of consistent example—to the education of their children, or, it may be, of their children's children,—as that they *may* be an honour to them,—and a comfort and support to their advancing and declining years—to the evening of their life's long day.—And it implies, on the other, the duty of children to *be* an honour to their fathers and grandfathers;—to lay to heart the influence which their behaviour cannot fail to have on the respectability, the character, the happiness of their parents.

Yes, my young friends; you may be their honour, or you may be their disgrace. Which would you wish to be? If you are not “without natural affection,” I need not answer the question. For your fathers' and mothers' sakes, then,—and to some of you I may say, for your grandfathers' and grandmothers' sakes, as well as for your own, let me urge you to *goodness*—to the adoption and cultivation of right principles, and especially of the principles of true godliness. O remember, that by one course of behaviour you will weave a garland of honour for the aged brows of those you love;—by another, you will encircle those brows with a crown of thorns,—ay, and, it may be, “bring down their gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.”

What an honour was young Timothy, who “from a child knew the holy Scriptures,” to “his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice!” And what a stain upon his reputation—a sword in his bones—a weight of oppressive sadness on the spirit of his old age, were the profligate sons of Eli!—and Eli, let parents remember, was himself to blame; for “his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.”

“*And the glory of children are their fathers:*”—that is, I need hardly say, when their fathers are what they ought to be; when by character they have earned for themselves general affection, esteem, reverence, and honour. When this is the case, these feelings naturally attach themselves to their descendants. And when children follow their example and conduct themselves aright, this serves to double their honour. “The sons are honoured in the honoured sires.”

Alas! it is not always the case, that fathers are, as they ought to be, “the glory of their children.” Too frequently are they the reverse. Their children and grandchildren have to struggle into life against all the disadvantage arising from the disreputable characters of their sires. Let parents bethink themselves of this. They do not stand alone in the effects of their evil ways. Whatever disgrace they incur becomes a drag upon their children’s advancement. The child that comes of so disreputable a stock, is unavoidably regarded with a suspicious and uneasy jealousy. There is a fear to trust him; a fear that he may inherit his father’s principles, and follow his father’s example. The effects of the father’s infamy thus descend to him; and if ever he rises above it, and by his virtuous, honourable, and pious behaviour, commands our confidence and esteem, our admiration, respect, and love—no thanks to that father; he owes no part of it to him. It is self-acquired; or rather, let us say, he is indebted for it to the superintending providence and distinguishing mercy of Heaven; and he will be disposed, humbly and thankfully to say—“By the grace of God, I am what I am!”

Verse 7. “Excellent speech becometh not a fool; much less do lying lips a prince.” The plain sentiment of the

first clause is, that the language of wisdom and piety is unsuitable to the lips of a foolish, unprincipled man:—

1. There is, what first and immediately strikes us, *incongruity*. To use the comparison of Solomon on another subject, it is “like a jewel of gold in a swine’s snout.” We wonder where the man can have got what he utters. We are quite sure it is *not his own*. He gets no credit for it. The surprise we feel in hearing it, only awakens our attention the more to his folly and wickedness. The latter are the more strongly and loathingly impressed by the power of *contrast*. There is superadded to former impressions of his character, the further one of hypocrisy; and the suspicion of a mask assumed for some selfish end.

2. There is a total want of *force*, or *weight*, in such sayings from such lips. You all know and feel the native power of name and character. The sayings of one whose reputation is justly high for wisdom and goodness, are in danger at times of being received even *too hastily*. Whatever bears the “image and superscription” of such a man, we are ready to accept without testing or looking at it, as *mint coin*. On the contrary, and from the converse influence of the same principle, we *suspect* the sayings of the foolish. We shake our heads and say, We must think again, before we put our seal of acceptance on anything that comes from such a quarter. We must examine it; we must test it, especially before we venture to act upon it. The sayings sound well; they seem good; but they are so very unlike the man, we fear there must be more surface than solidity.

3. Hence arises want of *influence*. When a fool utters a wise, or a wicked man a good, advice, he to whom it is given thinks himself, by the very circumstance of its coming from such a person, at liberty to disregard it. The advice having no worth of character to support and recommend it, goes for nothing,—falls lifeless and pithless to the ground.

It well becomes the public teachers of religion to lay these thoughts to heart. More “excellent speech” cannot be uttered than the doctrines and precepts, the counsels and warnings, of the word of God. But if the character of him

who utters them is notoriously at variance with his instructions, the incongruity shocks, disgusts, and revolts the hearer. It draws tears from the pious, and mockery from the profane. The latter feel the admonitions pointless. Good they may be; but they are blunted by the character of the speaker. They scoff, and exchange the sly wink with each other; or they are provoked at the thought of *their* being *schooled* by such a man! and, with the one feeling or the other, they leave the sanctuary, whispering or exclaiming with a careless shrug—“*Physician, heal thyself.*”

“*Much less do lying lips a prince.*” In such a case the incongruity, the indecency, the outrage on all consistency and propriety, is most flagrant. The prince ought to be the guardian of truth and honesty, of righteousness, and virtue, in the community. He who is officially their guardian, ought personally to be their example. The example is valuable; and so is the infusion of such principle into the administration of the government. There is nothing of more consequence for inspiring the community with confidence and so maintaining satisfaction and peace, than that rulers should *keep their word* to the people, redeeming every pledge, fulfilling every authorised and legitimate expectation. “Lying lips” may serve a present purpose, and suspend for the time a threatening evil,—but they will inevitably work mischief, and aggravate the dreaded calamity in the end. *Simulation* is bad in private life; worse in public; and worst of all in stations of high authority, example, and influence.*

I close with two reflections:—

1. Let none mistake the nature of the connexion between parents and children,—so as to imagine that the grace and the godliness of the one will avail and be accepted for the other. Every individual, old and young, must stand before God *for himself*. Godly parents and godly forefathers will not, in the great day, profit ungodly children, or be any protection to them from the avenging justice of God:—on the contrary, their godly ancestry will come in among the aggra-

* For further illustration, see chap. xvi. 10—13.

vations of their guilt and condemnation. They can have no share in their glory, since they have not "followed their faith," and traced the path to heaven in the footsteps of their holy example. Religion is a *personal* thing. There is no having it by proxy. Eli's sons were not accepted for Eli's sake. Let parents beware, and let children beware. If they would meet in heaven, and be each other's "joy and crown" in the final day,—let parents seek by all divine means, to have their children for their spiritual as well as their natural offspring; and let children receive the instructions, and emulate the Christian excellences of their godly parents. Then shall parents and children be the glory of each other, and Christ the glory of both.

2. *Spiritual children* are the glory of aged ministers and fathers in the Christian church—the house of God:—and when these are useful in their turn in bringing others to God, those of whose conversion they are the instruments, are *children's children*. So Paul and so John regarded their converts. It is not wrong surely for Christ's ministers to covet the honour of such a spiritual family,—who may be to them their "joy and crown" in the day of the Lord. Alas! that after even a long lifetime of labour, the number of such should often be so small! It gives reason for "great searchings of heart," whether, and how far, the cause may be found in deficiency of faithfulness, and earnestness, and prayer. I would humbly thank my God for the number of the members of this church to whom He has been graciously pleased to render the ministry of his gospel within these walls the means of saving benefit. And I would say to the congregation at large—I long for *your* salvation, and pray God, "that I may have some fruit among you also!" We must stand together at "the judgment-seat of Christ." O that I may then be found to have delivered my own soul by faithfulness to yours;—and that you may be found so to have profited by your privileges and opportunities, as that you may give your account with joy; so that minister and people may rejoice together!

"BRETHREN—PRAY FOR US!"

LECTURE XLVI.

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PROV. XVII. 8—15.

A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it; whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth. He that covereth a transgression seeketh love: but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends. A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool. An evil man seeketh only rebellion: therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him. Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly. Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house. The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with. He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord."

Two views may be taken of the first of these verses. It may refer to the person who *receives* the gift, or to the person who *has it to bestow*.

1. In the former view of the words, they may be explained in *this* way:—A gift is a mark of regard, of approbation, of confidence, of honour. It gives the recipient of it credit and consequence. It thus contributes to obtain for him further favour. Wherever it comes to be known, it operates for his benefit. A modest man will not be disposed to puff it off;—but in proportion as he rather conceals it, or says nothing of it, the more effectually does it tell in his behalf when it is known. And this will be still more the case, if the gift has been bestowed by a person of eminence, —high in station, or high in character and in public esteem. The man also of a different disposition,—the artful, insinuating, self-sufficient man—may, in a variety of ways, turn a gift to good account,—so that it shall tell for his advantage. He

knows where the character and the influence of the giver are highest; and *there* he makes the most of it. "Whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth."

2. Viewed in the other light, (which is the more likely sense of the words) as referring to the person who *confers* the gift, or *has it to bestow*,—we may notice *first*, that the reference may be to the man who *is known* to have something to bestow *which all covet*. In this case, every one desires his favour, strives to oblige him, tries every means of insinuation into his good graces. A man who has any skill in manœuvring may, in this way, render what he has to confer a capital instrument for pushing forward his own prosperity; keeping all in expectation,—cherishing hope,—making his desired and coveted gift look first one way, then another, then a third; perhaps partially bestowing, and still reserving enough to hold expectants hanging on, so as to have them available for his own ends. *Secondly*:—On the part of those who have gifts to bestow, uses may be made of them that are honourable and prudent,—quite consistent, not with mere self-interest, but with right principle. They may be employed to avert threatened evil, and for the more sure attainment of desired good. Such was Jacob's gift to his brother Esau; when, in setting it apart, he said, "I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward will I see his face." Such was the gift of the same patriarch, at a later period, to "the man the lord of the country," when he sent his sons the second time to Joseph in Egypt.—*Thirdly*:—The verse is generally, and probably with justice, understood of gifts that have the character and the object of *bribes*, the idea being that "*a gift*" is as tempting, as irresistible as a precious jewel;—that the man who has it and is disposed to give it, can seldom be at a loss to find another equally willing to receive it;—that such is its power that it "prevails over all men, dispatches all business, carries all causes, and effects whatever a man desires." (Bp. Patrick.) Alas! for human nature, if this account of it be true. And, although there are not a few honourable exceptions from the inculcation,—yet wonderful it is to what an extent a gift, sufficiently

tempting, and artfully managed, may be made to accomplish all that is thus ascribed to it; how many evasions and plausibilities men discover to satisfy their consciences, or rather to hoodwink and blind them, in accepting what no consideration can reconcile with common honesty. To what a fearful extent have these observations been verified in the system of parliamentary electioneering, and in all the varieties of public jobbing!—no matter whether by whig or tory. It is no business of mine to balance accounts between them. In either the one or the other, the practice is equally odious, and ought to be branded with public execration.*

Verse 9. “He that covereth a transgression seeketh love: but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.” We have, in this verse, a new aspect of a sentiment formerly under notice.† The verse before us may be applied to offences committed against *ourselves*, or to those committed against *others*.

As to the former:—we should be slow to take offence. We should throw the veil of concealment, in the spirit of the love which the verse before us inculcates, over everything that can be passed by without violating the precept of “not suffering sin upon our brother.”—Then, further, when, in consequence of our dealing, the wrong has been confessed, and forgiveness for it extended, it must be *buried*; there must be no “*repeating*” of it to others,—no recalling of it to mind and to notice on future occasions. This is extremely hurting to the feelings of the offender, when he has confessed and been forgiven; and is the sure way to renew the breach, and to make it wider and more hopeless than ever. If we are to confirm attachment and give permanence to reconciliation, we must be silent as the grave as to the past.

With regard to trespasses against *others*:—there are many

* “A *bribe*, if accepted, will influence in many ways, even without a consciousness of its power, on the part of the receiver. *Turn he which way he will, the influence of it will follow him.*” So Stuart, but the language seems hardly susceptible of such an interpretation, however true the sentiment.

† Chap. x. 12: xvi. 28

little things which we may come to know of, as having been said or done by one friend respecting another,—said or done, perhaps, without any evil intention whatever,—yet of such a nature, that, if *told* to the person, are fitted to produce in his mind an unpleasant impression. *The very repetition* of them invests them with an importance that does not belong to them. It makes him to whom they are reported, think much more of them than he would have done, had he *heard or seen them himself*. These, then, charity and discretion alike demand that we hide in our bosoms.

Then with regard to cases of serious importance, observe—

First:—If we alone are privy to the fact, our first business is *with the offender*; just as much as if the trespass had been one *against ourselves*. We should represent his conduct to him in love—the inconsistency of it with the claims of friendship—and try to bring him to a sense of his error. If we succeed in effecting this, let not the friend against whom the evil has been said or done, but who is in entire ignorance of it, be ever informed of the matter at all. Let it be as though it had not been; except as to the offender's disabusing the minds of others on whom he may have made a similar impression.

Secondly:—If it be a case in which the aggrieved party *must* be informed; the information must be imparted with a faithfully, and carefully minute adherence to *truth*; without exaggeration; without irritating representations; in the evident spirit of sincere regret and love. When we succeed in making up the breach,—which, in every case, ought to be our great end,—then the same rule as before must be followed; we must never “repeat” the matter,—either to the one or to the other of the parties, or to any neutral persons. That might only tear open the recent wounds, make them bleed afresh, and perhaps fester into incurable sores.

Thirdly:—Let another lesson be remembered, which we are exceedingly apt to forget; namely, that all *unnecessary repetition* even of *real* faults comes under the category of *scandal*, and is sinful and mischievous. You may fancy you are within the limit of blameworthiness, when you are

telling no more than what is *true*:—but, if you are telling even truth *needlessly*, for no good and laudable end, you are chargeable with the offence. Some people have a strange delight in repeating grievances. They are ever coming out with—“What do you think such a person *did*?” and, “What do you think such another person *said*?” They gather up every idle rumour—catching it from the passing wind;—giving to every evil report an additional pair of wings. Sometimes they pretend to be very *confidential*. What they have heard they tell to you alone,—“and remember,” say they, (putting their finger significantly on their lips,) “it is a profound secret.” Generally, however, such persons will be found selecting for their confidants those whom they well know to be incapable of keeping a secret to themselves. And thus it finds its way at last to the quarter where the mischief was intended: the schemer of it, all the while, wearing the mask of friendship—all kindness, all regret, all sympathy.

O these “tattlers and busy-bodies, speaking things which they ought not!”—they are the very pests and vermin of social life,—as despicable as they are annoying and noxious.

Verse 10. “A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool.”

The “*wise man*” understands aright his own interest. The knowledge of *truth* and of *duty* is the object of his sincere and earnest desire. He is thankful to be freed from his own errors, instead of being doggedly tenacious of them, when he can obtain truth instead; and readily relinquishes whatever practices he has been accustomed to follow, when made to discern their inconsistency with the claims either of God or man. The “*fool*” clings pertinaciously to whatever is his own—his own thoughts, his own projects, his own ways,—simply because they *are* his own. He possesses neither a genuine love of truth, nor a candid and humble solicitude to know and to do what is right.

Now “*a reproof*,” or even the simple intimation of his fault unaccompanied by any direct rebuke,—a mere look of disapprobation—“entereth more” into the former “than *an*

hundred stripes" into the latter. It affects him, that is, more deeply, with conviction, compunction, shame and sorrow; and produces more of practical effect in the way of "confessing and forsaking."* Even taking wisdom in its lower sense, as relating to a man's discreet understanding of his temporal advantage, he who possesses it will keep his ear and mind open to intimations of error and danger, even though conveyed in the form of sharp reflection on his own prudence, rather than ruin himself by a headstrong and self-willed opinionativeness.

The spirit of the verse may be applied to the influence of the *word* of God and the *providence* of God. A simple notification of evil, coming from the word of God, will "enter more into the wise man," who "trembleth at that word," than a hundred of the sharpest strokes of His providential rod will into the ungodly and the froward. The latter, indeed, without divine grace accompanying the strokes, will be provoked by them, rather than subdued. And even amongst the children of God themselves, there are great diversities of temper; some requiring harder dealing than others to bring them down, and to reclaim them from their follies: as is the case often with children in the same family. A word, or a look, will go with melting and heart-breaking power to the very soul of one; while the severest correction, and oft-repeated, will fail to bring down the stubborn and fractious spirit of another. O for more of the spirit of Job, and less of the spirit of Jonah!—for more of that truly child-like disposition, which gives way before every divine admonition, which melts into penitence under the eye of an offended God, and looks up with a child's submission at the slightest touch of his corrective rod!

Verse 11. "An evil man seeketh only rebellion: therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him."

This rendering accords with that of the Septuagint. By others it is inverted:—"A rebellious man seeketh only evil, or mischief:"—and others still understand the verse as

* Comp. chap. ix. 7—9.

meaning—"A seditious man shall surely fall into mischief." In *the general effect*, different renderings bring out much the same sentiment. The character appears to be one which, in the experience of Solomon, as well as of other princes, had often occasioned great trouble;—that namely, of an unprincipled, discontented, intractable, indomitable spirit—ever seeking to disturb the public peace, to stir up and foment broils and insurrectionary tumults; whose element is strife; who loves it for its own sake; and who seeks by it, not the ultimate attainment of the public good, but the adoption of some empirical nostrum of his own political quackery;—who is reckless of consequences, regardless of the sufferings of all who stand in his way. "*A cruel messenger shall be sent unto him.*" This seems to mean, the inexorable executioner of the sentence of the law. Such is generally the end of the turbulent man of mischief and wrong. He brings upon himself the punishment required for the protection of the lives and property, the liberty and well-being of others, of the community at large.

O my friends, let the reproofs of God's word, and the corrections of God's providence, be attended to and obeyed *now*; for "who hath hardened himself against HIM, and hath prospered?" "*A cruel messenger*" shall be at last sent unto him. *Death* shall be such a one to you—"ye that forget God," and love evil;—for death will summon you to the bar of the Eternal. O take warning. "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." God now sends a *merciful* messenger, to testify to you the riches and freeness of his grace, and his willingness to save. He speaks to you by his own Son, and prays you to be reconciled to himself. If this gracious Messenger be rejected, he shall be succeeded by a messenger of vengeance that shall shut you up in the prison-house of everlasting darkness and despair. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"

Verse 12. "Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly."

A strong expression!—but, when the subject of it is rightly understood, not a whit *too* strong. The reference is, not to

the mere teasing and vexatious talk of the loquacious, empty-headed, and self-conceited pedant or coxcomb. In *that* there is more of the troublesome and annoying than of the dangerous. But the comparison before us expresses, and is designed to express, real *danger*. And the danger intended does not seem to be the murderous rage of the infuriated fool or wicked man,—when stung by resentment, and, under the impetuous power of his headstrong passions, ready for all mischief:—although I would not say that this idea is to be excluded; for “a bear robbed of her whelps” is no unapt comparison for an unprincipled man in a passion. But in harmony with the frequent warnings of this Book, the reference is most probably to the *spiritual* danger arising from the society of foolish and wicked men. The bear, in all the fury of its disappointment and privation, can do no more than kill and lacerate and tear in pieces the *body*. The “fool,” if he succeed in *his* unprincipled attempts, especially on unsuspecting and simple-hearted youth, will murder the *soul*—seducing it from virtue and from God, and consigning it to the death that never dies. A “bear robbed of her whelps” seems anything but an appropriate emblem of him, in regard to temper and kindly pretensions. But this only augments the danger. The very smoothness and flattery of his manners is the peril.

O my young hearers, beware of “the fool in his folly”—of the unprincipled libertinism of the licentious, with all their fascinating temptations! Would you flee from the rage of an infuriated wild beast—from the paw and jaws of the lion and the bear?—flee with still greater terror from the company of the wicked.

Verse 13. “Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house.” On this subject the Bible takes high ground. *Good for evil* is the Bible law from first to last.* It has been said very truly—“To render evil for good, is *devil-like*; to render evil for evil, is *man-like*; to render

* Exod. xxiii. 4, 5; Deut. xxii. 1—4; Job xxxi. 29, 30; Prov. xxiv. 28, 29; xxv. 21, 22; Matt. v. 43—48; Rom. xii. 17—21; 1 Pet. iii. 9.

good for evil, is *godlike*." The ungrateful forgetfulness of favours, is bad; but the requital of good with evil, is the very utmost stretch of depravity. Yet alas! even this is far from being a rarity. Selfishness is the besetting sin of our fallen nature. It reigns paramount. It sets aside the claims of both God and man. Selfish men receive the good bestowed upon them, merely for its own sake. They have no consideration for the giver, further than as conveying the benefit to them. They feel no attachment on account of the principle by which the bestowment of it has been prompted,—though to a generous spirit that is a gift's chief value. They snatch the good, and, in the enjoyment of it, never think more of the hand from which it came. What is that to them? Their own interest is promoted:—and, should the interest of the kind friend from whose bounty it has come ever stand in the way of theirs, they laugh at the thought of obligation, and sacrifice it without a scruple. *Every man for himself*, is their base and sordid maxim.—O shun selfishness. Cultivate the generous and forgiving spirit of the Bible. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let *this* mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

All persecution of good men, in return for the affectionate zeal with which they set themselves to promote the best interests of others,—their spiritual and eternal good,—comes fully under the condemnation of this verse. That is indeed "rewarding evil for good." How writes the poet of Whitefield?—and what is true of him is but a portraiture of every genuine servant of God:—

"He loved the world that hated him: the tear
That dropp'd upon his bible, was sincere.
Assail'd by scandal and the tongue of strife,
His only answer was—a blameless life;
And he that forged and he that threw the dart
Had each a brother's interest in his heart."

And when this fraternal interest,—animating to self-denying earnestness of effort to impart the very best of blessings, is requited with reviling, and persecuting, and casting out

the name as evil—what a melancholy manifestation of the tendencies of our fallen nature to render evil for good!—and how awfully was this displayed in the person of the blessed Redeemer himself! All that he did and suffered was *for men*; yet men, instead of requiting him with grateful love, “pierced and nailed him to the tree.”

The temper of mind, and the conduct proceeding from it, that are here condemned, are very displeasing to God. They are contrary to His *nature*, contrary to His *example*, contrary to His *commands*. Many a time in retributive righteousness has God testified to this; and how often—as in the case of Saul for his persecution of David, which was from first to last a “rendering of evil for good”—has the closing denunciation been realized—“*Evil shall not depart from his house.*”

Verse 14. “The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with.”

When in the embankment of a canal, a river, or a reservoir of water, a very slight fissure is made,—the water at the first only oozes through, and comes by drops; but by degrees the opening widens; the mound is gradually sapped and weakened; and at length it gives way, and the bursting inundation sweeps everything before it. So, from what trivial beginnings have discords the most extensive, distressing, and ruinous, often originated!—Thus we find it among children:—and in this respect, as in some others, “Men are but children of a larger growth.” A single word, the motion of a finger, the glance of an eye, happens to be noticed; and being interpreted as conveying a certain meaning, is resented;—the measure of the retaliation is of course excessive, and it provokes a return; the quarrel rises; the breach is widened; irreconcilable alienation ensues; and the alienation of the individuals spreads to families, to circles of friends, to neighbourhoods, to communities!

In Scripture, an evil is sometimes condemned and rebated *in itself*; and at other times, on account of its consequences. The latter is the case here. “*Strife*” is in itself an evil, and as such to be shunned. But it is the more to be

shunned, that its tendencies and effects are as here described. "Leave it off before it be meddled with," is a strong way of conveying the admonition to *have nothing at all to do with it*. Rather let the offence pass than risk the consequences. When the fissure in the embankment appears, let the first drop of oozing water be the signal to stop the leak, and prevent the threatening flood.

And nowhere is the maxim or the counsel more appropriately or more strongly applicable, than in *the churches of Christ*. The contention of two individuals may soon embroil a whole church. Let each feel the duty, then, of self-control. If one word has passed their lips, let them beware of a second; for a second will lead to a third, and a third still more certainly to a fourth. He who is able to return bitter with sweet, will be most approved by the divine Master. Look at the consequences; and "leave it off before it be meddled with." And where the fissure of passion has unhappily, to any degree, widened, let all unite in throwing in the materials of love, and stopping up the gap.

There is one kind of strife, which of all possible descriptions, it is wisdom to "leave off before it be meddled with,"—with which indeed there can be no greater infatuation than to meddle at all:—it is *the strife of sinners with their God*. Sinner! God has a controversy with you. It will be well for you to submit in time,—to submit in humble self-condemnation. Persist not in a strife so unequal and so hopeless. If you spurn at your sentence, and return the holy frown of an offended God with the proud look of sullen rebellion,—you are widening the breach; you are "provoking the Lord to anger." That anger is in the meanwhile suspended; but in the end it will infallibly burst forth, like an overwhelming flood, and sweep all his enemies away. "Behold," He says, "I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place," Isa. xxviii. 16, 17.

Verse 15. "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord."—To "*justify the wicked*"—is to take part with him, in opposition to evidence,—and, though the evidence condemns, to make the sentence one of *acquittal*. To "*condemn the just*" is, of course, the counterpart of the same crime; pronouncing sentence, contrary to, or unsustained by evidence, against *the innocent*. There may be various motives, by which individuals are tempted to this crime:—the fear of evil from the power and influence of the wicked man, or the hope of benefit from his favour; self-interest, in one or other of its various forms:—and in the other case, spite and envy; malicious dislike of principles or of conduct by which their own are condemned; revenge of fancied injury; considerations of expediency; and others of a similar kind. How fearfully was the motive of *expediency* exemplified in the case of perfect innocence and righteousness, in the person of the Son of God!*

No consideration can ever, in any case, warrant the act.† The judgment of God is denounced against all who are guilty of it.‡

And yet, manifest and universally admitted as is the evil here declared to be "*an abomination to the Lord*," there are those who would have the Lord himself to set the example of it. Men are sinners. They have broken God's law. That law has condemned them. This of course is the same thing with their being condemned by the Lawgiver—by God himself. If they are condemned justly,—that is, if they have sinned and are wicked, he never can *justify* them in the sense in which the word is used in this verse. That would be to contradict himself,—to condemn and acquit,—declare guilty and declare innocent—at the same time. It would be to take part with sin. It would be to give false judgment, and to do that himself, which He pronounces "*abomination*" in his creatures. This God cannot do, any

* John xi. 47—50.

† See Exod. xxiii. 7; Deut. xxv. 1.

‡ Isa. v. 23; Ezek. xxii. 27—29; Amos v. 12.

more than He can pass sentence of perdition on an innocent angel,—or than He would have inflicted death on man while he continued to “hold fast his integrity”—continued without sin. God could not condemn man in innocence; neither can He acquit man in his guilt. In the one case, He would “*condemn the righteous,*” in the other, He would “*justify the wicked.*”

And yet God *does* justify—and justify the *ungodly*. It is the very purpose of the gospel to provide for this being done in a way consistent with truth, and with all the claims of righteousness and law. How is it done? The answer is—that sinners are condemned on their own account, but justified on account of the merits and mediation of another—even of Him whom Jehovah has appointed as the atoning and interceding Redeemer. In *so* justifying the ungodly, the divine righteousness stands as unimpeachably clear as the divine mercy; “mercy and truth meeting together, righteousness and peace embracing each other.”

Let two closing reflections suffice.

1. As in the administration of justice,—in the world or in the church,—so in the official declaration of doctrine and of duty,—*faithfulness* is the first and most essential qualification. No “gift,” no bribe, no love of gain,—or, in the apostle’s phrase, “greed of filthy lucre,” must ever be allowed to corrupt “the man of God,” and tempt him either to pervert or to keep back the truth,—to “shun to declare” any part of “the counsel of God,” or to utter a single sentiment but what he believes to be a lesson of God’s word,—a divinely authorised message. For a minister of Christ either to say what is false or to withhold what is true, from a wish to please those on whom he may feel himself dependent, is as unworthy of him as for a judge on the civil bench to pervert justice; and may be to others unspeakably more mischievous. The decisions of the latter can affect only what is temporary; the effects of the former’s unfaithful temporizing may extend to eternity. The guilt of the former, therefore, may be greater than that of the latter, in the proportion of the value of the *soul* to the *body*, of *eternity* to *time*. There

must be no bribery and corruption here. O to be able to say with Paul—"I AM CLEAR FROM THE BLOOD OF ALL MEN!"

2. How vast the benefit, were the precepts of Christ, especially on the subject of *offences*, regarded and followed out with a more conscientious and practical strictness! And on this particular subject, O never fancy yourselves at liberty, in *any one* case, to dispense with *any one* of His directions. I speak the experience of thirty-eight years of pastoral superintendence, when I say, that in no single instance has departure from the prescribed course failed of producing the most pernicious results. The rules of Christ are the rules of Him who "knoweth what is in man." And an incalculable amount of the discord and trouble, which are ever and anon occurring in the churches, would be prevented, were His people only to follow with scrupulous exactness the prescriptions of those rules.

LECTURE XLVII.

—♦—
PROV. XVII. 16—20.

“Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it? A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. A man void of understanding striketh hands, and becometh surety in the presence of his friend. He loveth transgression that loveth strife; and he that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction. He that hath a froward heart findeth no good; and he that hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief.”

WISDOM is frequently pronounced to be inestimably precious—a good for which no price can be found. What, then, can be meant by “*a price to get wisdom?*” By some another turn—but, as seems to me, a turn far from natural,—has been given to the sentence:—“Of what avail are the rich fool’s riches to him, since he has not a heart to get wisdom by means of them?” The sentiment thus expressed is true; but it is no more than a branch of the more general sentiment conveyed by the words; one form—one variety only, of the evil. We understand the term “*a price*,” as signifying, *whatever puts it in any one’s power to acquire the particular object*. The phraseology is borrowed from the *market*. Any article, we are wont to say, may be had there, if a man has but the price to pay for it. What the “*price*” is to the article wanted, the *means of acquiring* are to “*wisdom*.” When we wish to put any article of ordinary merchandise within a person’s power, we furnish that person with the price at which it is valued. There are cases, however, in which this may not be enough. The price may be in a man’s hand, and yet the article may not be within his

reach—not, at the time, to be had. Happily, it is never so with the wisdom here spoken of. If the means are possessed of acquiring it, it may always be acquired. It is in the hand of God himself; and He is never either at a distance that we cannot repair to him; or unwilling to bestow it upon us, when we come to him for it—*bestow* it I say; for we must remember, with regard to divine wisdom, that in a literal sense, it *cannot be purchased*. It must be had “*without money and without price*.” It is not to be “gotten for gold.”*

Why is it, then, that in so many cases in which “the price is in the hand to get wisdom”—the means of securing it possessed—its lessons remain unlearned, the mind ignorant, the heart unimproved? Whence the sadly prevailing deficiency, and even destitution, in the knowledge of the very simplest elements of divine truth? Whence is it that we find the ideas of so many minds so strangely crude, superficial, and confused? How comes this to be so frequently the case, even where *all* means and opportunities have been fully and long enjoyed?—where there has been early tuition; where *the word* has been in the house and in the hand, and the ministrations of it in the ear for many years of Sabbaths?—Here is the answer—the only one that can with truth be given,—there has been “*no heart to it*.”—The principle is of wide application, and might be largely illustrated.

Why, for example, is not the knowledge of God learned by the heathen themselves from the volume of nature?—or rather, how has it been that they have not retained the knowledge originally possessed, though surrounded, in creation, with all that is fitted to keep them in mind of it? The apostle answers the enquiry—“*They did not like to retain God in their knowledge*.” In other words, they had “*no heart to it*.” Why were the Jews, with all their superior means of knowledge—possessing, as they did, God’s “lively ora-

* See Isa. lv. 1. There is a contradiction in the idea of *buying* “without money.” The word has been rendered more generally, *procure*. The original term is used to denote *what is usually effected by means of a price in money*. And such is the case here.—(Author).

cles"—many of them—ay, the large majority, so miserably ignorant of the character of their own Jehovah? Why? because they had "*no heart to it*"—the inclinations of their minds lay to the idolatrous follies of the surrounding nations. Why "forsook they the fountain of living water, and hewed out unto themselves broken cisterns which could hold no water?" The answer is the same, they "*had no heart to it.*"

There is no maxim more thoroughly established by experience, than that a man cannot excel in anything to which *his heart does not lie*. When do men succeed best in the pursuit of any object? Is it not when they *have a heart to it*? What is it that keeps all men astir in the pursuit and acquisition of wealth?—Is it not that *they have a heart to it*? How do men acquire celebrity in any of the departments of science or of art? Is it not when they *have a heart to it*?—some measure of enthusiastic eagerness and persevering delight in the pursuit?—My young hearers know well, that they acquire most readily, and attain to the greatest proficiency in, those branches of knowledge to which they have *most heart*—which are most congenial to their inclinations,—to the taste and bent of their minds. You then set about it in earnest; you prosecute it with energy and perseverance; you let no difficulties deter you, nor cease application till you have mastered them:—it is your pleasure, and success in it becomes your distinction. If you "*have no heart to it,*" the work is all *up hill*; you begin it with reluctance; you yawn and nod over it; you are pleased with every little apology for neglecting or shortening your lesson; your knowledge is partial and superficial; and you quickly let slip the little you have learned.

The lessons of the Bible,—those of them especially which it is of most importance to know, and which are the most essential elements of true wisdom,—are far from being beyond the apprehension of any of your understandings. Why then—to bring the matter home—have you not an extensive acquaintance with these lessons, and with all the contents of the sacred volume?—its histories, its doctrines, its precepts,

its promises, its prophecies, its devotional compositions? Is it not—speak the truth—because you “*have no heart*” to the study of the book that contains them? Can you, in conscience, assign any other reason for the difference between your attainments in this department of knowledge, and your attainments in others that are of a more secular and worldly, or merely literary and scientific, character,—than that you have less of interest in the one study than in the others—less pleasure in it—*less heart to it?*—Why is it that you do not cherish the fear and the love of God by the contemplation of those views of his character which He has, in his works and more especially in his word, revealed?—is not the reason the same—that you have *no heart to it?* This, the Bible tells you, is wisdom. But, although your *judgment* cannot refuse its assent—its constrained and reluctant assent—to the proposition, your *heart* goes not along with it. It is not the “wisdom of this world;” nor what the world will ever regard as a recommendation. It is not the wisdom, therefore, which you choose and which it gives you pleasure to think of acquiring. I put it to your consciences,—whether there be anything else whatever, that keeps you from the knowledge and the fear of God, wherein true religion consists—than your *having no heart to them?*—Talk not to me of *inability*:—your inability is entirely moral; and consists in nothing else whatever than your “*having no heart*” to that which is good. And is this not criminal? If not,—then is there no sin nor crime on earth, in hell, in the universe; nor is the existence or the conception of such a thing as moral evil possible. The want of heart to that which is good, is the very essence of all that is sinful. You offer anything but a valid excuse for your want of religion, when you say you “*have no heart to it.*” You plead in excuse the very essence of your guilt. If you desired to fear God, and could not help the contrary, your inability might be something in your behalf. But the thing cannot be. To desire to fear God, and not to be able, is a contradiction in terms. The having of the desire is the having of the principle. There can be no desiring to fear without fear-

ing; no desiring to love without loving. Would you admit it as an apology for a rebellious child, that he desired to love his father but *could not*?—Yes; there is one case in which the apology might stand—if there was nothing in the father that was lovely, but everything fitted to repel and to quench affection,—And will you venture to offer this plea in your case? If indeed you can make it out that there is no loveliness in God, your plea may stand!—If you can make it out that there is no beauty in Christ, why you should desire him, —then may your disaffection to *him* be excusable. But if in Christ and in God there is everything lovely, and that *ought* to be loved,—then your “having *no heart to it*” must be your guilt and condemnation. O what a hopeless task you would undertake, were you to plead the want of loveliness,—the absence of all that is amiable—in God and in Christ! Your own lips would condemn you. Give up your plea. Acknowledge your sinful alienation. Turn to Him who says —“Behold I will pour out my Spirit unto you:”—“Ask and ye shall receive:”—“A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.”

Verse 17. “A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.” These words contain the just commendation of faithful constancy in friendship and brotherly affection.—A false and faithless friend professes great attachment—is the extreme of devotedness, when the object of it is in prosperity and honour, and when connexion with him is a credit and a benefit. But when the world ceases to smile upon him, when their plaudits are hushed, and their court is withdrawn—though without any cause in the forsaken and the fallen, whose character and deserts remain the same,—he cools, and skulks, and disowns him. When attachment is of service to himself, he will gladly share all the good,—bask in the light of his countenance,—make his favour a stepping-stone to his own advancement; —but when the evil day comes, and association with him ceases to be a credit and a benefit, he sheers off, and knows his dear, his valued, his esteemed, his excellent and honoured friend no more!—abandons him in the very

hour when the worth of true friendship is most deeply felt, and the sustaining and sweetening influences of its genial sympathy most keenly needed!—shakes himself loose at the very moment when he should stick fastest!—A genuine friend—the only friend worth having, and when found, of inestimable value,—is the same in all changes of condition; the same in every respect but one,—that his heart gets warmer to his friend as the world gets colder; he becomes the more a friend to him as other friends fail;—stands the more firmly by him, and avows his attachment the more openly and the more fervently, in proportion as, by the false and faithless, he is unworthily deserted. His attachment is to *the man*—not to his wealth or his honours; and if *the man* remain the same, no change of *circumstances* will lessen the ardour of his friendship.—Of such disinterested and steadfast friendship, we have a fine exemplification in the case of Jonathan and David. In opposition to a father's unreasonable and groundless jealousy, and at the sacrifice of his own interests and prospects as heir to the throne, did the faithful Jonathan cleave to David, through all his trials and dangers and shifting fortunes,—guarding him from harm; encouraging and cheering him in his difficulties; and clearing the way for his advancement, till he himself met his death on Mount Gilboa.—Other instances are on record in the pages of history;—and in a greater and less degree, in more private life, have the same principles of self-denying and generous attachment—true even to death—been manifested.

“*And a brother is born for adversity.*” Some would render the words—“And he” (i. e. the true friend) “is born to be a brother in adversity.”—But more probably, as the previous part of the verse describes what a *friend* should be; the latter clause describes what a *brother*—or any near relation—should be.*

* “‘*A brother for adversity*’ is one who will act the part of a brother in a season of adversity. Of such an one it is said, *he must or shall be born*, (possibly) *he is born*. I do not understand this last clause, unless the assertion is, that none but such as are *born brethren*, i. e., kindred by blood, will cleave to us when in distress. Yet this is

Adversity is the time when affection is put to the proof. It is hardly at all tried among relatives, when all is going well, and there is no call in providence for sacrifices on the part of any members of the domestic circle, in behalf of the others. But when, through unforeseen circumstances, privation and distress become the lot of any of them, then is the test of the sincerity and strength of natural affection. Brethren are born to help each other in need. This is the will and purpose of God in placing them in their near relationship. It is sad when this fails; and beautiful when it is displayed. It is not when Naomi "goes out full," but when "the Lord brings her home again empty," that the fond attachment of Ruth draws to the eye the tear of approving and delighted sympathy. It is in the reverses and fallen fortunes of his kinswoman—widowed, desolate, and dependent—that the fidelity and generosity of Boaz are brought out into conspicuous manifestation.—We shudder at the unnatural conduct of Joseph's brethren; while in Joseph himself—whether viewed in the providential arrangements of his history, or in his amiably pious and forgiving disposition,—we see "a brother born for adversity."

Verse 18. "A man void of understanding striketh hands, and becometh surety in the presence of his friend." The sentiment of this verse appears as if suggested by the preceding.—It might naturally be asked—If "a friend loveth *at all times*," is not the time of his reduction of circumstances just one of those *times of need* when the sincerity of friendship is tested, and when the love is called for?—The answer is—Unquestionably. Solomon does not mean to say that *in no case* ought friendship thus to express itself. But he certainly does mean to say, that it should not be done in all cases; that it should not be done with reckless and inconsiderate hastiness. He does mean to say that

true only in a qualified sense. But another shade of meaning may be assigned to the passage; which is, that such a man as a friend in adversity, *is yet to be born*, i. e., none such are now to be found; thus making it substantially equivalent in sense to the expression: 'How few and rare are such faithful friends.'—(Stuart).

there are *other* claims besides those of friendship, which even those of friendship must not exclude from consideration. There are some enthusiastic sentimentalists on the subject of friendship, who talk wildly and at random of its paramount claims. O! there is nothing that must be allowed to stand in the way of *friendship*:—everything must yield to it! They seem ready—in words at least, to sacrifice at its shrine all other claims of men whatsoever, and even the very claims of God himself. Now, right and amiable as the earnest desire to help a friend may be, we must beware of what may be termed the *romance* of friendship. Let as great sacrifices be made as *self* can bear, when self alone is implicated. But the extent of ability must be considered. Circumstances must be rationally weighed.

There are claims of family; there are claims of creditors and of partners in business; there are claims of the cause of God. Imperious as the claims of friendship may be, the claims of wife and children, and the claims of obvious justice, must not be disregarded and put out of account for them.—And then, in every case, it should be well considered, whether by our advances and suretiship the friend is, after all, ultimately and in the long run, to be benefited. He may think so. It may be quite clear to him. No doubt about it. But sanguine minds, under the pressure of immediate difficulty, are of all others the most in danger of imposing on themselves. And in such cases, when neutral eyes, seeing more clearly and further forward, discern the illusion and its cause;—painful as it may be to disappoint the eager wishes and confident anticipations of the friend who may be looking to you as his last resource, and assuring himself of your standing by him,—yet to go forward with the certainty, instead of ultimately doing him service, of only making bad worse, and involving yourself with him in common loss and ruin, would assuredly be a very mistaken exercise and evidence of friendliness.—And again, it may be remarked, *friendship* should be very cautious of pressing such claims,—of urging to such proofs of its sincerity. There is good ground for suspecting the soundness of the

friendship, and for fearing there is in it too much of the selfish, when a man is very eager to draw his friend into such engagements.*

Verse 19. "He loveth transgression that loveth strife; and he that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction." The former of these propositions requires no proof. For, *first*, strife itself is transgression. "Wars and fightings come of our lusts which war in our members." The angry and resentful passions cannot be indulged without sin.—And, *secondly*, strife *leads to* transgression. It is the unfailing occasion of much evil—in temper, in word, and in action. If a man is desirous to bring himself and others into sin and suffering—into trespass and punishment,—he cannot accomplish the end more effectually than by fomenting contention. Strife at once *springs from*, and gives strength and exercise to, the principle from which all men's evil deeds and words against each other proceed—the opposite principle of *love*: love being the fulfilling of the law, and enmity its universal breach. Wisdom then and duty alike say, "Give place unto wrath."†

"*And he that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction.*" Some take this for a comparison:—As surely as he that exalteth his gate (enlarging it out of due proportion) seeketh destruction to his house, by thus weakening its structure,—*so surely* does he that loveth strife generate transgression.

The phrase "*exalteth his gate*," however, instead of being thus understood literally, may, with more propriety, be interpreted of a man's *ambitiously affecting a style of living beyond his income*—disproportionate to the amount of his means of maintaining it. The *general character* is described by one particular manifestation of it—the high style of the exterior of his mansion. The "*exalting of the gate*" applies to the entire style of his household establishment—not to his dwelling merely, but to his equipage, his table, his servants, his dress, and every thing else.—He who does this "*seeks destruction*:" he courts his own downfall, as effectually

* On this subject see chap. vi. 1—5.

† Rom. xiii. 8—10.

ally as if it were his direct object to ruin himself. Matthew Henry, in his own quaint and pithy way, says—"He makes his gate so large, that his house and estate go out at it."—A man's manner of life may, with perfect propriety, be proportioned to his circumstances; though a man of christian principle will rather keep within the allowable boundary than go beyond it—rather keep below than go above his means. But—

1. A man sets out in high style upon little or no capital—desiring to get credit by giving the impression of abundance. The man who does this, acts not foolishly only, but falsely. It is an imposition—a practical lie. There is too much of this; too much of a departure from the sober-minded prudence of our forefathers. If a young man, in ordinary station, sets up a domestic establishment, it must now be all at once in such style, that it presents a hindrance to many from entering into married life, and thus operates to the prevention of domestic habits, and to the fostering of dissipation and vice:—and at the same time, it embarrasses business at its outset, and exposes to many anxious fears, and many serious risks, which might, and ought to be shunned by the good old-fashioned way of beginning on a small scale and in a plain way, and working a gradual rise. This is the way of prudence and security:—the other is the way of speculation and hazard.

2. If a man of principle rises in his style of living as his means advance, he should, on a corresponding principle, cheerfully and proportionally, *retrench on their decline*.—The contrary is another of the evils frequently to be seen in our day. A man is what the world calls *unfortunate*. He compounds with his creditors; and he lives on just as before; still "exalting his gate;" still maintaining all the show and style of his former course, to the utter perplexity and amazement of simple and honest minds,—that can't at all comprehend how it is that a man contrives to keep up *on nothing*—or on what they think, in their honest simplicity, *ought to be* nothing,—the same style of living that he maintained when his business prospered and his riches

increased. The contrary is required by many considerations.—*Submission to God* requires it. The course described bears the aspect, and, it must be feared, is the reality, of rebellion against His providence.—*Justice to men* requires it. He who, in a reverse of circumstances, continues to keep up his full style of expenditure, neither acts like a Christian, nor like a man of common honesty. His first business is with his creditors; and his first aim, at every cost of self-denial, to pay them, what every honest man must wish to pay them, *twenty shillings in the pound*.—*Peace of conscience* requires it. How can a man, who has a remnant of sound principle left, enjoy himself, when he is “faring sumptuously every day” on money that belongs to others?—And let me add—a *just regard to his own interest* requires it. He who never comes down, or who does it, not spontaneously but by sheer and stern compulsion, takes the surest way to impair respect and to forfeit confidence and credit and reputation in business. He who, on his fall, gives all up, in the spirit of integrity and honour, commands universal esteem, secures trust, and produces in every rightly principled mind a desire to help him again forward, and promote his prosperity.

On the closing verse we need not dwell, as we have had the same sentiments frequently under review:* only let all mark afresh the assurance and ponder it well—“He that hath a froward heart findeth no good: and he that hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief.”

* Chap. iii. 22; vi. 12—15; x. 14, 31, &c.

LECTURE XLVIII.

PROV. XVII. 21—28.

“He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow: and the father of a fool hath no joy. A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones. A wicked man taketh a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment. Wisdom is before him that hath understanding: but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth. A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him. Also to punish the just is not good, nor to strike princes for equity. He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.”

“HE that begetteth *a fool*.”—A child of weak capacity? No. Such a child, though a trial in one sense, may be a source of joy in another—true, sweet, lasting joy: for it is almost impossible to say how feeble the powers of intellect may be, and yet a parent’s heart be gladdened by witnessing that child a subject of divine grace;—the mind, as far as its powers go, apprehending, though but imperfectly and glimmeringly, the elements of gospel truth, under the secret teaching of Him who “hides these things from the wise and prudent, and reveals them unto babes,”—and the heart experiencing, though in much simplicity, the influence by which the affections are drawn to God, and the conscience rendered sensitive to his authority.

“A *fool*” means a *graceless* child,—froward, unprincipled, a “despiser of that which is good,” without the “fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom.” Such a child brings to a godly parent’s heart “grief,” “sorrow,”

"bitterness." These are the terms here employed, (verses 21, 25) and along with these we have the strong *negative* form of expression:—"The father of a fool *hath no joy.*" The meaning is more than that he has no joy *in that son.* The character and conduct of that son serve to infuse "bitterness" into everything else. There may be many things in his domestic lot fitted to inspire cheerfulness and delight:—but at the happy moments, when his heart, yielding to all the fond impulses of conjugal and parental tenderness, is swelling with the emotions of gladness, the thought of his perverse, rebellious, profligate boy comes over him, sends through that heart the pang of agony, "turns his harp to mourning, and his organ to the voice of them that weep."—Nothing but blinding partiality can prevent this in the case of a pious parent. And such partiality, alas! is too common, and very mischievous and very cruel to the youth who is its object. There is no cruelty worse than this mistaken blindness; this shutting of the eyes to a child's sinful propensities; this incredulity of evil; this easy, indulgent disposition, that cannot bring itself to apply a check, and still goes on hoping the best,—smiling at trespasses, in its own, as venial faults, which, in other children, it would condemn with gravity as serious offences; and looking, or professing to look, to *grace*, while neglecting the ordained means by which grace operates. David "never had displeased Adonijah in anything, by saying to him, Why hast thou done so?"—and the upshot of it was, in the old age of his indulgent father, ambitious rebellion, and the risk of civil war:—and there is every reason to fear that, to a certain degree at least, he owed to the same parental partiality and indulgence, the still more atrocious and unnatural conspiracy of Absalom, whose premature death drew from his eyes the bitterest tears they ever shed, except those for his own sins.—For a man who has the affections of nature, and who believes God's word, to see a son, "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh,"—the object of his yearning love,—the subject of his early care, of his tears, his prayers, his watchings, his anxieties, his fears, his hopes,—walking in

the way of sinners, refusing instruction and admonition, taking his side with God's enemies, living in ungodliness and vice, going on, in all appearance, to perdition, unawed by correction, whether from the parental or from the divine hand, and untouched and unsubdued by entreaty:—O! if there be a drop in the cup of life of pure undiluted "bitterness,"—this is that drop. And special emphasis is here laid on the sorrow and heart-break of a pious *mother*—"bitterness to *her that bare him*;" bare him, with the throes of a mother's anguish; but *those* were throes which introduced the joy of a mother's love, and were light when compared with the agony of a mother's wounded spirit for her child straying from God.—On the contrary, if there is a draught of pure delight in this valley of tears, it is the joy of a godly parent in a godly child!

Do you wish, then, parents,—how strange and needless a question!—do you wish to have joy in your children, and not "sorrow," and "grief," and "bitterness?"—*Mind your duty.* Neglect not means; and when you use them, use them with an affection that is regulated by judgment, and a judgment whose firmness is softened by affection. Mind instruction, example, correction, and prayer. Their corrupt nature our children derive from us. If we neglect instruction, or mislead them by our example, or fail to correct, and to draw down by prayer the blessing of a covenant God upon them,—we become ourselves the causes of our own sorrow, as well as of their danger and ruin.—And children:—O! knew you but the "bitterness" you infuse into the parental cup,—could you but put your lips to it and taste it,—it would—had you a drop remaining in your heart's-blood of a child's sensibility,—it would send a pang through your spirit; it would arrest you in your wild and godless career. If ever you have a serious reflection, and your parents should then be no more, how bitter to yourselves will be the cup of your remembrance! For your parents' sakes, and for your own—"remember your Creator in the days of your youth:"—"forsake the foolish, and live."

Verse 22. "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine:

but a broken spirit drieth the bones.”*—The first clause stands in the original—“A merry heart doeth good—a medicine;” and we may either supply *like* or *is*; and read “doeth good like a medicine,” or, “doeth good—is a medicine.” In the margin we have “to a medicine;” by which is meant, what undoubtedly is included in the general sentiment, that a cheerful, contented spirit, contributes to promote the beneficial influence of a medicine in the recovery of health.† A spirit that is cast down and “broken,”—not so much, in this connexion, by afflictive visitations, (though in that case too, there is truth in the representation) as by impatience, thanklessness, disappointment, discontent, envy—“drieth the bones.” Under the influence of this gnawing, carking, dissatisfied spirit,—the spirit of peevish dulness, that never smiles on the lips or sparkles in the eyes, but is oppressed with a weightier heaviness by the very cheerfulness of others, as if it hated everything so unlike itself,—the body pines and wastes. Instead of the bones, in the terms of the prophet, “flourishing like an herb,” they wither for lack of moisture; the healthy secretions fail; the strength decays; all is fretful debility and indolence.—I would not confine the expression, however, to this description alone of a dull and cheerless spirit; it is true, as has been hinted, of the effect of the burden of affliction,—and it is specially true also of the load of conscious guilt and the heavy, soul-depressing apprehension of coming wrath. This is indeed a canker-worm, that secretly consumes the very vitals, and, if not effectually relieved, may lay the body, like a skeleton ere it dies, in the grave.

In sickness, cheerfulness “is a medicine.” In some disorders especially, an easy and happy mind is the very best of healing antidotes, and assists in the efficiency of every other.

* Compare chap. xv. 13 and 15.

† Stuart renders, “*will do the body good.*” The word גִּידָה, which only occurs here, is translated *body* in the Chaldee and Syriac. “This makes,” says Stuart, “a more congruous sense, for body then corresponds to גִּידָה, *bone* in the other clause, which last is only a tropical appellation of the word *corpus*.”

And what is the nature of the cheerfulness or "merry heart," which Solomon here commends? We are sure it is not the "laughter of the fool;" for of it he says "*it is mad*,"—and short-lived too, "like the crackling of thorns under a pot," only leaving, when the blaze is over, a gloomier sadness. What he here and elsewhere commends is the cheerfulness of a heart that has found peace with God, and the joy of God's salvation. There may, it is true, be a natural buoyancy and lightness of spirit, to which, in a limited acceptation, the words before us may truly enough be applied. But above all, and in the fulness of their meaning, are they true of the heart in which there has settled the "peace that passeth all understanding"—the happy sense of God's love, the cheering hope of God's glory. Here is sunshine,—here is gladness. A commentator,* whom I occasionally quote for the pithy comprehensiveness of his remarks, observes—"It is a great mercy that God gives us *leave* to be cheerful, and *cause* to be cheerful; and especially if, by his grace, he gives us *hearts* to be cheerful." Yes—

"Ten thousand thousand precious gifts
Our daily thanks employ;
Nor is the least—a cheerful heart,
That tastes those gifts with joy."

O let us be thankful above all for those springs of spiritual and never-failing joy which God, in the fulness of his mercy, has opened for us, when, so far as our deserts were concerned, every fountain of sweetness might have been "sealed," or converted into a fountain of bitterness. Let us drink of the "wells of salvation," and "go on our way rejoicing!"

Verse 23. "A wicked man taketh a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment." We have had this subject so recently before us, that we shall not again dwell upon it.†

The only phrase here that suggests a remark in addition to those formerly made is—"taking the gift *out of the bosom*."

* Henry.

† See verse 8.

The phrase implies *concealment*. He who *gives* from the bosom, and he who *receives* from the bosom, are both desirous to have the action hidden. The “gift”—the *bribe*, must both be given and received *covertly*.

Let the briber and the bribed, alike bethink them of the words—“*Thou, God, seest me!*” The secret bribe may to men remain a secret—a secret through life—a secret till the judgment-day. But *then*—God will “bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts.” He abhors the deed. He will visit it with vengeance.

And let all my hearers bear in mind—there is a judgment which can by no possible means be perverted. There is no bribing the Judge of all. He is infinitely beyond the reach of “gifts.” All receive from Him. He can receive from none. The universe, with all that it contains, is his own. Where is the creature who possesses any thing, that is not God’s in an infinitely higher sense than it is his? And in that dreadful day that shall sum up and close the history of our fallen world, when all shall be summoned before the bar of the Eternal; when not one shall be able either to evade or to resist the summons; when the sentences of all that have ever lived shall come forth from an authority whence there is no appeal, and shall take sure effect the instant they are pronounced, and settle for ever the doom of each unbelieving and unpardoned culprit there—*then*,—O *then* “what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”—how shall he buy off his doomed and trembling spirit?—Were the universe his, he would offer it all. But where is the influence that can shake eternal justice? What “bosom” contains the bribe that can command even a commutation of the sentence?—There is ONE, who has paid the ransom of a fallen world. God has accepted the ransom. It is not “a gift that perverteth the ways of judgment.” It is a “propitiation, to declare God’s righteousness in the remission of sins.” *This* ransom may avail for you in all its blessed fruits of pardoning mercy, sanctifying grace, and life everlasting, in a way that “brings out God’s righteousness as the light, and his judgment as the noonday.”

Verse 24. "Wisdom is before him that hath understanding: but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth."

One translator renders the words—"In the countenance of a wise man wisdom appeareth; but the fool's eyes roll to and fro:"—the rolling of the eyes being understood as the indication of an unsettled and vacant mind. But there is more, surely, in the sentence than mere physiognomy,—or than the mere expression of the mind in the countenance. Another understands the contrast as meaning that wisdom is *near to* the one and *far from* the other:—"wisdom is before"—that is, ever near to—"the man of understanding;" "but the fool's eyes are in the ends of the earth"—*seeking it; it is far from him.*

The meaning seems rather to be simply this:—The maxims and principles and directions of true wisdom are *before* the man of understanding; that is, they are kept ever in his view. They are familiar to him, and constantly applied for his guidance in the right way,—ready for immediate use, in all circumstances. In whatever condition, and whatever emergency, "wisdom is before him:"—the *word* of God is before him,—the *fear* of God is before him; the one the *rule* of wisdom, the other the *principle* of wisdom; both, before his memory, his conscience, and his heart. Wisdom leads, and he follows.

"*But the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth.*"—He has no fixed and steady principle or rule; nothing on which he fixes his eye for his guidance. His thoughts are incessantly wandering after matters he has nothing to do with,—anything and everything but that which he should at the time be minding;—roving after every vanity, and keeping steadily to no pursuit. It is specially true of "things pertaining to salvation." Wisdom, in this matter above all others, is "before him that hath understanding." He looks to one point. He sees *one thing to be needful*. He sees the wisdom of God providing for it. There he fixes. And this is wisdom. It is ever before him. *One end—one means.* Whereas "the fool's eyes are in the ends of the earth." He has examined nothing. He roves at random, with no de-

terminate ideas about the most interesting, by infinite degrees, of all concerns. Ask him *how he hopes to be saved*; you immediately discover his thoughtless unsettledness. He is in “the ends of the earth.” His answer is to seek. It is here; it is there; it is nowhere. He hesitates; he supposes; he guesses; he is at a stand; he cannot tell. This is very mournful; but it is very common. My friends, wisdom is *before* you—in this Book of God. But it is in vain that it is here, if you set it not by faith before the eye of your mind and the contemplation of your heart, that you may follow it. Wisdom may be fixed in the book; while your eyes are roving away from it in every possible direction. O be persuaded to learn it here, to set it before you, and to follow it for your good.

There is another character that may here be meant—by the fool whose eyes are in “the ends of the earth;”—namely the *schemer*—the *visionary projector*. The truly intelligent man applies the plain and obvious dictates of common sense and prudence to the attainment of his ends; and in the quiet and persevering application of evidently appropriate means, he pursues and gains them. But the scheming, visionary fool is for ever after out-of-the-way plans, new and far-fetched expedients; ever experimenting, where experiment is useless; ever theorizing, and ever failing:—yet by no failure convinced or corrected; but still, instead of fixing his eye on the near, gazing out on the far off;—and instead of patiently looking for the regular produce of his own proper occupation, projecting something *new*, and generally as wild and harebrained as new; looking for his income from a distance, from something yet, and yet to be tried,—expecting good to come to him from “the ends of the earth.”

Thus, in every view, the fool resembles the man who, on a road that is full of traps and pits and snares, and beset with dangers on right and left, instead of having (to use a colloquial expression) *all his eyes about him*, has them roving, in idle vacancy, on far distant objects.

Verse 26. “Also to punish the just is not good, nor to strike princes for equity.”—The word rendered *prince* signi-

fies *noble*, and is differently understood. It may be applied to the nobility of *station*, or to that of *mind*. Some give preference to the latter; and by interpreting it of the *noble-minded*, and the "*just*" in the former clause, of the *righteous* or the *people of God*, make the two clauses thus to correspond, and to have much the same import. It seems, however, both more natural and more comprehensive, to consider *two* ideas as expressed; the one relating to the duty of the *ruler*, and the other to that of the *ruled*. It is the incumbent duty of the ruler, on the one part, to administer justice with strict impartiality. It is the duty, on the other part, of subjects to countenance, encourage, and support the ruler in the equitable administration of his trust. To "*strike*" is evidently to be understood, not literally alone of actual striking, but of "smiting with the tongue" as well as with the fist or the rod,—of all kinds of vituperation and abuse, and attempts to bring the throne into disrepute and odium, and unsettle its stability, by shaking the confidence and attachment of the community. There are many occasions in which a man may be tempted to this. He may, in particular cases, have his mind biassed by pride, by self-interest, by partiality towards a friend, by political predilections; so that even when all has been done with impartial investigation, and the judgment pronounced according to the legitimate rules of evidence and demands of equity, there may be unfair, unreasonable, and angry dissatisfaction; and the prince may be smitten for justice. Every man ought to be on his guard against this. The higher the responsibility,—the more burdensome and difficult the trust,—and the more serious the results of bringing authorities and the laws into disesteem, and unsettling public confidence in them,—ought to be the amount of our reluctant caution in pronouncing censure.

Another remark may be ventured. One of the great difficulties with which governments of great nations have to contend, arises from the variety of crossing and contending interests with which they have to deal. How anxious soever they may honestly be, to allow no undue bias to draw them from the line of impartial justice, yet there is hardly a

measure they can adopt that does not affect differently different classes of the community; so that, from their various predisposing circumstances, that shall appear to one class,—to those in one particular department of trade or commerce,—the very essence of injustice, which by another is lauded as a most unexceptionable exemplification of impartial equity. This ought surely to have the effect,—I do not by any means say of forbidding the most vigilant observance and the freest and most searching scrutiny and discussion of every measure, and the exposure of its evil or questionable character and tendency,—but assuredly of procuring some allowance for the difficulty of the task of pleasing all parties, and some moderation in the tone of censure even where to us the grounds for it are clear and palpable. No man who knows himself will affirm, in almost any case, that, placed, in other circumstances, he might not see with other eyes.—I speak in general. There are cases, in which the interests of a suffering country are to a vast extent, involved, in which it becomes every man's paramount duty to speak out and to speak plainly, and to make the ears of the rulers to tingle with the outcry of humanity and justice.

I would further apply the spirit of this verse to the case of *arbitrators*. We have ourselves, it may be, consented to submit a litigated point to arbitration. We do so with a full persuasion of our being in the right—of our claim being the just one. But the arbiters unite in giving it against us. It would be most unreasonable on our part to retain a grudge, especially at the one appointed by ourselves, on this account. Our reference implied confidence in his impartiality and honour, and implied a pledge of cheerful acquiescence. To grumble, to censure, and to withdraw our friendship, would be indeed to “*strike him for equity*.” He would have proved himself unworthy of his trust, if his disposition to please and serve us had been too strong for principle, conscience, and oath.

There is *one* government, in which “the just” are never “punished,”—all whose laws and all whose sanctions are the perfection of equity. But alas! it is under that very gov-

ernment that the spirit expressed by the phrase "striking princes for equity" is most fearfully manifested. All the murmurings of sinners against either the law of God or its revealed and threatened penalty, are the very essence, in its deepest malignity, of this spirit. There can never be reason for it here. Let sinners submit to God; own the righteousness of His law, and the equity of its sanction, and bow to the outstretched sceptre of His grace.

Verse 27. "He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit."*

Modesty and diffidence, sound judgment and discretion, make the wise man "*sparing of his words*;" but the connexion naturally leads me to the view generally given of the passage—namely, that the wise man lays his tongue under restraint when his spirit is warm, and when he feels he would be in danger of speaking unadvisedly, improperly, injuriously to others or to himself. The phrase "*an excellent spirit*" is on the margin, more literally, and in the present instance, I should think more appropriately—"a cool spirit." He has the power of self-control, of the government of his passions;—he is meek and lowly in heart; conciliatory and forgiving in his disposition. It is this that enables him to maintain coolness in his manner, even when inwardly, were he giving way to corrupt nature in its felt tendencies, his blood would boil over, and his lips utter perverse things.

The fool might get a character for wisdom, had he only wit enough to be quiet;—"Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding." Folly, to be known, must be *uttered*. If it is kept in, it may pass undiscovered; and the very reserve might contribute to give a stranger the impression of wisdom; since "he that hath knowledge spareth his words." But the loss of the fool is, that he "cannot withhold himself from speaking; and thus he cannot conceal his folly."

* Comp. chap. x. 19. and chap. xv. 28. and see too Jam. i. 19 and 26.

LECTURE XLIX.

PROV. XVIII. 1—8.

“Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom. A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself. When the wicked cometh, then cometh also contempt, and with ignominy reproach. The words of a man’s mouth are as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook. It is not good to accept the person of the wicked, to overthrow the righteous in judgment. A fool’s lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes. A fool’s mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul. The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.”

Of the first of these verses two views are given by critics and commentators. They are *opposites*. The one makes Solomon refer to a pursuit of knowledge and wisdom that is right and commendable, the other regards him as speaking of what is wrong and censurable.—And of this second view of the general meaning there are several varieties. By one critic* the intended character is thus described—“A self-conceited hair-brained fool seeks to satisfy his fancy, and intermingleth himself with all things.” Another† draws it thus:—“He who has separated himself agitates questions as his desire prompts, and breaks his teeth on every hard point.” A third‡ thus—“The recluse seeks his own pleasure, or inclination; he laughs at, or derides, everything solid or wise:”—and a fourth,§ differently from all these—“He seeks occasions, who desires to separate himself from his friends.” In the margin, we have it thus: “He that separateth himself,

* Schultens.

† Schulz.

‡ Parkhurst.

§ Hodgson.

seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom ;”—and, from the reference subjoined, (Jude 19.) it is evident in what sense this was meant to be understood.

Another gives it, like our translators, a general form, without directly expressing either good or evil in the case:—“A retired man pursueth the researches he delighteth in, and hath pleasure in each branch of science.”

I am disposed to think that our own translation gives the sense—“Through desire”—that is, the desire of knowledge—“a man having separated himself”—that is, having retired and secluded himself from interruption by the intrusion of companions and the engagements of social life—“seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom.”

Among other reasons for preferring this view of the verse, I may mention, that to me there seems to be an intended contrast between the character in the *first* verse and that in the *second*. The contrast is between the man that loves and pursues knowledge, and the man who undervalues and despises it.

In the investigation of each of the sciences, and in the pursuit of general knowledge, many have been the instances of men devoting themselves to research,—“rising early and sitting late”—expending time, and toil, and mind, and treasure, for the acquisition. Different and mingled motives have incited and maintained the pursuit. The love of knowledge for its own sake ; the love of reputation and fame, present and posthumous, as one of its results ; and a benevolent desire to contribute, by means of it, to the comfort, entertainment, improvement, and happiness of mankind, as another. Men of literature, and men of science and art, have discovered an abstraction and a perseverance in their respective pursuits,—though in some instances disproportionate to the real value of their objects,—eminently creditable to their mental powers, and to their powers of application and research.

It were well if the word of God,—the fountain of the best and highest of all wisdom—had a greater number of such ardent and devoted students. Alas ! how many there are, and ever have been,—men of eminence in erudition and

science,—by whom its sacred pages have been neglected, and who have remained utter strangers to the knowledge it communicates;—who have thought *that* knowledge quite beneath them, and would have been ashamed of being seen with the Bible in their hands or of being for a moment supposed ever to look into it!—"In that hour, Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Here is knowledge which babes may understand; and yet here is knowledge for the grasp of angelic minds. And this union of the simple with the lofty and sublime,—of information for a child amongst men, with subjects of devout admiration for seraphs before the throne,—is one of the evidences of divinity with a heavenly origin with which the Book is enstamped. The philosopher may despise it; yet it contains depths that are beyond the soundings of the longest line of his wisdom; and if he despises it, because its blessed discoveries can be apprehended, sufficiently for their salvation, by the unlettered poor and the lisping child, he despises it on account of one of its divinest and most wonderful excellences.

Let it be observed, at the same time, respecting the study of the Bible, that there are dangers to be guarded against. There is the danger of studying it simply as a *branch of science*, or of mere philosophic speculation. There are many points relative to the evidences of Christianity, and to the system of theology which the Bible unfolds, such as may engage and interest the inquisitive mind, while the soul remains estranged from its influence—the knowledge "playing round the head," but never reaching the heart.

There is the further danger—against which all its public teachers require to be on their guard,—of merely studying the Bible *professionally*; preparing from the Scriptures, something to be preached, week after week, to others, without a due impression of its importance to themselves, or the necessary *personal* application of it. The Bible may, in this way, be studied for a life-time, and never be felt and exemplified in its spiritual and saving power. Yes, my friends.

There are other unworthy ends for which a man may wish for, and choose, the profession of a minister, besides the desire of a *living*, or of a reputable standing. This is one—*fondness for literary retirement*. Here is a situation for its indulgence. A man may thus, in literary leisure, “seek and intermeddle with all wisdom.” I will not say, *honourably*; I will not say *safely*. For nothing can be more *dishonourable*, than for a man to choose, for his own gratification, what ought to be a scene of active inquiry and effort for the benefit of others; to convert into a literary lounge, and a source of mere selfish mental luxury, the most fearfully responsible of all the services in which it is possible to be engaged.—Yet there is far more in the word of God than that which lies on the surface; and it is well when sanctified minds devote themselves to such researches as are fitted to bring out for public benefit its hidden treasures. And here lies one part of the value of a *well-instructed ministry*.

Verse 2. “A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself.”—This verse, as we have said, presents a contrast to the first,—an opposite character. According to the sense we have put upon the first verse, it is the *desire* of knowledge and wisdom, that induces the man who “separateth himself” to choose his seclusion, that he may follow out the desire with success. But the fool has no such desire. He “has no delight in understanding.” If he seeks knowledge at all, it is neither for its own sake, nor for the purpose of fitting him for usefulness, but solely for the ends of self-display. He “hath no delight” in knowledge, “but in the displaying of his own thoughts.”* His delight is in the gratification of vanity and self-conceit. Such kinds and measures of knowledge as may just save his credit, or enable him, in the company he frequents, to show off,—to talk so as to be admired and flattered,—he seeks eagerly:—and a very superficial smattering may serve his purpose. He thus makes manifest to every sensible and observant mind, both the weakness and emptiness of his understanding, and the

* Hodgson.

vanity of his heart. In the use he makes of his knowledge, such as it is, his heart “discovers itself.”

It may mean too, that the fool—the unprincipled man—seeks knowledge such as accords with the perverse propensities of his heart; such as he can use for the gratification of those propensities. In the very *choice* he makes of the knowledge to be sought, as well as in the *use* he makes of it when it has been acquired, he shows the state of his heart.

For the purpose of vanity and self-display, the fool may take a fancy to attend a little, among other matters, even to *divinity*. Such subjects may be introduced. When they are, it would never do for him to have nothing to say. He does not *like* them, it is true; they are very dry; not at all to his taste. But still, the appearance of utter ignorance would be mortifying; and by the contrary,—by showing that he can talk on that as well as on other subjects, he has his vanity gratified. The very thought of the applause of his circle,—of his sentiments being received with—“*Spoke like an oracle!*” is everything to him. It is to be feared, that with some this goes further; and that the discovery of what is in the heart is of something worse than vanity. There are those who seek a little acquaintance with the doctrines of Christianity, for the purpose of enabling them to say some thing against them; and who get a smattering of the arguments of infidelity, that they may go primed with them to the club or the tavern, or the debating society, and there get a reputation for being persons of free thought and independent spirit, by sporting sentiments that are in contrariety to what are ordinarily held, and showing their superiority to vulgar prejudices. They pass for *choice spirits*, that have freed themselves from the leading-strings of a nursery education, and learned to *think for themselves*. Thus “the heart discovers itself.” There is nothing there of the real earnest love of truth; but the desire of a character for originality and boldness, and for being the oracles of their circle. This is a very sad, but, it is to be feared, no very uncommon case. And it is no less sad when the sacred truths of the divine word, instead of being studied for their own sakes, and for

the infinitely important ends to which they are designed to be subservient, are made the mere food of vanity, and means of a fool's self-display.

Verse 3. "When the wicked cometh, then cometh also contempt, and with ignominy reproach."—The sense of this verse will somewhat vary, according to the sense attached to the first clause. It may mean:—

1. "When the wicked cometh" *into places of public trust, power, and influence*—"then cometh contempt." They bring "contempt," not to themselves only, but to the places they fill, and the societies to which they become united—to themselves, for the unworthy manner in which they fulfil the duties of the trust they have assumed, or have had committed to them; and to their places and societies, with which their names are associated. They entail "*ignominy and reproach*" upon all they have to do with. And in no case is this more true, than with regard to offices in the church. O what an amount of scorn and reproach has been brought upon the sacred office of the ministry by the intrusion, under numberless pretexts, and from numberless causes, of wicked, worldly, ungodly men into its holy functions. How full is Church history of this deplorable evil!—and how many infidels and scorers has Church history by this means produced. Thus it was under the old dispensation. The wickedness of the sons of Eli made men "abhor the offering of the Lord." And thus it is still. Of the "false teachers" who should arise in the latter days, it is said—"by reason of them the way of truth shall be evil-spoken of." From few other sources, if from any, has there proceeded a greater profusion of unmerited "reproach" of the name and doctrine and kingdom of the Lord; or has "the chair of the scorner" drawn a greater number and variety of its sarcastic sneers and bitter revilings.

2. The phrase may mean—"When the wicked cometh" *into intimacy, companionship, familiarity*, "then cometh contempt."—He who admits the wicked to his intimacy—makes him his associate,—must share the infamy of his ill-chosen companion. Many a time too has *this* been exemplified.

Many a fair reputation has been blasted,—many an honoured name brought into disgrace by association with the wicked and worthless. On *this* account, then, as well as on the higher ground of the risk of infection from the contact of evil, beware, all of you,—beware, especially my youthful hearers,—of such associations. Keep aloof from the wicked and the foolish. Be assured, there is far more reason to fear that he will debase and degrade you, than to hope that you will elevate him. You will get the disgrace of *his* society, rather than he the credit and the honour of yours.

Verse 4. “The words of a man’s mouth are as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook.”

Here two different interpretations have been given, as the terms are evidently susceptible of them.—1. The two clauses of the verse are by some considered as containing a *contrast* between two opposite things:—the *first* clause referring to the depths of evil and guileful counsel in the heart; while the words do not truly indicate what lies there concealed:—while the *second* refers to the transparent open flowing stream of true wisdom, from the heart of the upright and the good; whose conversation flows in a limpid current, not deep and turbid, but clear, fresh, cheering, fructifying.—2. It is more likely that the other interpretation is the correct one;—according to which there is no designed *contrast*; but the character of the former clause is to be taken from the latter:—“The words of a man’s mouth”—that is, according to the second clause, of a *wise* man’s mouth—“are as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook.” In the two clauses of the verse, on the principle of parallelism, there appears to be an inversion of the same sentiment;—for, properly speaking, the words uttered are not the “deep waters,” but the stream that issues from them; and, on the other hand, “the wellspring of wisdom” is not “the flowing brook,” but the deep and copious fountain or reservoir from which it issues. Another passage may serve to confirm this view. “Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man

of understanding will draw it out." Here, the counsel is the deep water—not the words. But the words are the stream which the deep waters send forth. The words bring out and contain the counsel. They are like "deep waters," inasmuch as they do not readily run dry—are not quickly exhausted. The stream of words is of a character such as indicates the depth or abundance of waters from which it flows. The wisdom proceeding from the deep and full fountain in the heart, flows in a pure and silent stream,—not like the shallow current, with rattling and brawling noise,—the apt emblem of the noisy but empty talk of the fool.

The sentiment expressed in the verse, we have already had before us more than once under different modifications.

The same may be said of the sentiment of the fifth verse. We have had it twice before us, though not precisely under the same form of expression, recently,* and it will come before us again hereafter:—"It is not good to accept the person of the wicked, to overthrow the righteous in judgment." Bear in mind, that what is true of causes in civil courts, or in submission to arbitration, is not less true of causes that come before the churches of Christ. There must be "*no respect of persons.*" It is of such cases the apostle James speaks when he says, "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?" James ii. 1—4. The last of these verses determines the meaning. If they were tempted to give a preference to the rich, in a plea between the rich and the poor, they were become "judges influenced by evil thoughts."—On the part of the church, and of all who may be appointed to in-

* See chap. xvii, 18 and 23,

investigate cases for their guidance in discipline, no duty is more important than that of “doing nothing by partiality.”

Verses 6, 7. “A fool’s lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes. A fool’s mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul.”—While the contrast here described is *wicked* as opposed to the character and will of God—the God of peace and love—it is marked by *weakness* and *imprudence*. He is weak-minded indeed who is easily offended,—takes every thing amiss,—startles at every act or look or word that can bear to be interpreted into a reflection or an insult,—is on fire and in a blaze in a moment, like a heap of combustibles on the falling of every spark,—vows vengeance,—“*enters into contentions*,”—“*calls for strokes*,”—gives his card, or sends his friend, challenging to the death the man who has dared to use a word out of joint and not in the perfect punctilio of etiquette and honour, or the glance of whose eye has seemed to his jealous spirit to speak defiance.—The grounds of such challenges, in the world of fashion, are in many instances—perhaps in *most* instances, the littlest and most pitiful imaginable,—unworthy of a man of common sense to mind,—such as should make any man blush to own them. True vigour of mind and wisdom, would regard and treat such trifles with the contempt which is their due; would not even allow its tranquillity to be disturbed,—the calm surface of their peace to be so much as ruffled by them.

And he is *imprudent*.—“Entering into contentions”—may refer to the contentions of *others*, as well as his own. The folly of fools is often thus discovered. They are so fond of strifes, that they quite delight when they find two fallen or falling out. They join the fray. They stir up the combatants; foment their wrath; touch their pride, and urge them on to all the vehemence of passion. They excite to lawsuits and duels, rather than do what lies in their power for their prevention; and delight to embitter bitterness, and to ensure interminable jars and irreconcilable alienation.

* See chap. xi. 13:—xii. 18:—xvi. 28.

Verse 8. "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly." We have had this character before us already: but it is one which cannot be too frequently exposed, or too strongly and severely reprobated.—The "*talebearer*" is generally very smooth and insinuating; very fair in his speech; very insidious in his purpose.—Love and regard are professed towards the party of whom the tale is told; and very sincere and deep regret at having such a tale to tell. "Who would have thought it!" he exclaims, "I hardly expect you will believe me. But alas! it is even so—*too true*." It is with extreme reluctance he repeats it, knowing as he does how very much it will grieve you to hear it. But then the very interest you take in the person renders it quite impossible to keep it from you; and perhaps—who can tell?—you may, by knowing it, be the instrument of doing him good. And many apologies are suggested for the unhappy doer of what he tells,—and palliations pleaded in his behalf, yet still with an insinuated uncertainty that puts a sting into the very plea. The words go deep. The wounds they inflict are deep. They pierce to the very vitals—first, on the reputation and character, and it may be, on the interest too, of the subject of the tale; slaying and destroying both, beyond recovery:—and secondly, on the confidence, the friendship, the peace and comfort of the person to whom the tale is told; infusing the venom of suspicion, or worse than suspicion into his mind; embittering his spirit; engendering feelings the most agonizing in regard to those whom he loved, and whom he still wishes to love, and whom to suspect of treachery or of wrong, is like tearing his very heart asunder.

The bite of a viper is not so deadly as the wound of these "talebearers'" stories and insinuations. The truth is, they contrive to infuse *their* poison without a bite. If they would but appear in their true character;—would they but show their fangs, and make us feel them, we should be put upon our guard. We know the viper. We shun it. And when it has unhappily succeeded in wounding us, we instantly have

recourse to means for preventing the poison from getting into the mass of the blood, and pervading the system. But these *human* vipers infuse their poison in the language of kindness and love. “Their words are smoother than oil; yet are they drawn swords;”—envenomed fangs, of which the virus gets into our system ere we are aware, works its mischievous and morally deadly effects, and becomes incapable of extraction. Every attempt at its removal still leaves some portion of it behind.—There is, in the original word, an implication of softness, simplicity, undesignedness, which only gives the secret weapon with which the wound is inflicted the greater keenness.

By one eminent critic the word rendered *wounds* is, by a different etymology, made to signify—“*like morsels greedily swallowed;*”—by which translation the passage is made to express what is certainly too melancholy a truth—the avidity with which the “talebearer’s” words are generally listened to and received,—swallowed with eagerness.—The other is the sense generally adopted.

Beware of every approach to the character yourselves; and beware of giving it any countenance or encouragement in others.—If there exists a character that deserves to be hooted out of society, and branded deep with disgrace and infamy, the whispering “talebearer” is that character.—O cultivate openness, straightforwardness, simple-hearted candour, unsuspecting charity—the charity that “thinketh no evil,” that “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things!”

LECTURE I.



PROV. XVIII. 9—14.

“He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster. The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe. The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as a high wall in his own conceit. Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility. He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him. The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?”

It must be obvious to every one, that the tendencies of *waste and thriftlessness* are the same with those ascribed to *sluggishness and idleness*.* They tend alike to *poverty*. The slothful man might have more by *diligence*; the thriftless man might have more by *economy*. Diligence and economy are sister virtues; laziness and thriftlessness are kindred vices:—the *sluggard* is brother to the *waster*.

The practical lesson is, that, in personal and domestic interests, *diligence* and *economy* should *go together*; and that the one without the other, never can avail, for either obtaining or securing, even the comforts of life. Of what use is industry if its proceeds are not prudently managed when they come in?—if husband, or wife, or both, be destitute of discretion, improvident and thriftless?—if there is the absence of all sober and considerate calculation, and, as a consequence, no due proportioning of outlay to income, but a reckless and wasteful expenditure, leaving an unlooked-for

* See chap. vi. 6—11; x. 4.

deficiency—a woful amount *minus*—at the year's end? The poor inconsiderate fools never think what they are about. They keep no daily reckoning—no accounts; and so their money is gone—they can't tell how—they had no idea they were living at such a rate!—and even when they have made the discovery, there is no improvement. They say, possibly, *they must take care*; but they only *say* it, and immediately forget it. Things go on as before; and still (to use rather a colloquial, but sufficiently expressive phrase,) what is taken in by the door is thrown out by the window; and still the wonder continues *how it goes!* They are ever marvelling how *other folks do*. They can't understand it. For *their* parts, all that comes in finds its way off from them as fast as it comes, and many a time faster!—Thus, as might be expected, there are the same appearances of bareness, and cheerlessness, and want, in the dwelling of the *thrifless* as in that of the *slothful*. Extremes thus meet.

The lesson of the verse is one for all stations. That which all, in every station, ought to aim at, is—a union of industry and economy; associated with a liberality proportionate to providentially bestowed means—a careful distinction being made between an economical, and a penurious and miserly, disposition,—a disposition that keeps all for *self*,—that grasps hard, and can part with nothing. This is what God commands; and this is what will ever draw the approving and confiding admiration of men.

Diligence, let me remind you, is as necessary for the acquisition of spiritual as of temporal good,—of the riches of divine knowledge to the mind, as of the blessings of the divine life to the heart.—And not less is *economy of means*. How often may it be seen, that with means of a very limited and stinted amount, there is more of spiritual prosperity in one instance, than is discoverable in another, with means the most varied and abundant. Many believers, it is to be feared, are spiritual spendthrifts. They use their privileges on no principle of economy. They read, they hear, they frequent ordinances,—and yet their progress in spiritual attainments bears no proportion

to the extent of their advantages. Rich in privilege, they are poor in both the graces and enjoyments of the life of God in the soul. Why? The answer is plain. They who thrive on slender means, make the most of what they have; whereas they who live in the midst of abundance get into habits of carelessness, and of the prodigal use of what they have—allowing a great deal of it to run to waste. Fellow-Christians, guard against this tendency. Improve *every part* of what you enjoy, as if it were the whole; uniting thus diligence and carefulness, that “you may grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;”—that the prayer of Paul for the Philippians may be fulfilled in your happy experience.*

Verse 10—12. “The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe. The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit. Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility.”

Between these verses there is a manifest and interesting connexion; and we therefore take them together in illustration. “The NAME of the Lord” means his character—his perfections, as revealed in His word;—*what any one is*, being naturally associated with, and suggested by, his *name*. When the Psalmist says, “They that know Thy name will put their trust in thee”†—it is quite obvious, that by knowing Jehovah’s *name* he means more than merely knowing that God was called *Jehovah*. It is to know God *Himself*;—the idiom being quite common in the Scriptures of using *the name of a person* as a phrase for *the person* to whom the name belongs. The comparison of Jehovah’s name to “*a strong tower*” is frequent.‡ There is in this, occasion for grateful wonder; that to a *sinner* God’s name should be a *refuge*!—Surely, it was not to have been expected that a rebellious and guilty creature should find his refuge *there*! It is that from which such a creature might be supposed to shrink and to flee, as yielding

* Phil. i. 9—11.

† Psal. ix. 10.

‡ Psal. xviii. 2; xxvii. 7; lxi. 3, 4; xci. 2; cxliv. 2.

him anything but the prospect of protection and safety. It is God *as revealed in His word* that is meant. The grand object of that word is to make known *the gospel*—the *way of salvation*;—God in his true character as *light and love*; “delighting in mercy;” “in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” It is in this character—in which he made himself known before the law, under the law, and more clearly under the dispensation of “the fulness of time,”—that God invites sinners to come to him, and to put their trust in him; in his name,—in his character, in the truths and promises of his covenant. To “*the righteous*—the name of the Lord”—the Lord in whom they have believed—“is a strong tower:”—a tower of impregnable security. And in times of temptation, trial, difficulty, and danger, it is always at hand,—so that they may “*run into it*,” and feel their safety. All that can be imagined necessary to ensure protection is combined in JEHOVAH’S NAME. There is the union of mercy and love, wisdom, righteousness, faithfulness, and power, all pledged in covenant promise, by their God and Father in Christ. Thither, then, may the tried, afflicted, imperilled, tempted child of God ever betake himself; and there he will delightfully feel that all is safe and well. There he can sit secure and sing—“God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea,” Psal. xli. 1, 2.

In the next verse, a temptation is mentioned to a very different kind of confidence:—“The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit.” This is a “strong delusion,” and shows the tendency of our nature, under various influences, to “believe a lie.” Surely he is going on with “a lie in his right hand,” who is thus “trusting in his wealth, and boasting himself of the multitude of his riches;”—who is thus “saying to the gold, Thou art my hope, and to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence;” who is thus “setting his heart upon that which is not.” While he exults in his security, and regards his wealth as his “*high*

wall” of protection from evils and sufferings that abound around him,—and alas! from within its entrenchments even sets at defiance the salutary admonitions of that God who gives him all, and warns him of a reckoning to come,—it is a “high wall” only “*in his own conceit*.” It is a wall of no real strength, and affording no real safety,—either from the ills of time, or from the woes of eternity. It is a wall that is only “daubed with untempered mortar,” and to which the words of the prophet may, in all their emphasis, be accommodated:—“Say unto them who daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower, and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall, and a stormy wind shall rend it,” Ezek. xiii. 11. It is a wall which, even although no desolating storm should overthrow it in the rich worldling’s life-time, is to him, in the very decay of his own life, mouldering away, and coming to ruin; and leaving him, in the end, to the full and torturing experience of all that is meant by the simple but alarming question—“Then, whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?”—Or, to change the figure—Death, like an armed man, in the might of his resistless commission, shall invade his stronghold, at the very moment, it may be, when he is most confidently vaunting of its security;—and before that all-conquering power, no wealth shall profit him; “no, not gold nor all the forces of strength.” The “*haughty heart*”—the spirit of proud and self-confident independence engendered and fostered by “*wealth*”—is but the prelude to “*destruction*.”

Verse 13. “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.”—Nothing, to be sure, can be more preposterously foolish than the conduct thus described. It is, however, in all departments, strangely common.

It is very common in *ordinary conversation*. How frequently do you find people who interrupt and answer you, ere you have half finished, or perhaps well begun, what you have to say!—It is common too in *causes submitted for judgment*—not so much so, perhaps, as in the former case, yet painfully common. A decision is pronounced at once with all confidence, before the statement and the proof are half

closed.—It is no less common in *matters of argument and controversy*. Your opponent will not allow you to complete your process of reasoning, but starts into a reply long before you have done, or can possibly be understood.

These are points of fact and character, of every-day occurrence. The sources of the evil are various; and in touching on them, its nature, and the “folly and shame” of those by whom it is practised, will more fully appear. I notice, then—

1. Natural or acquired *eagerness of spirit*, and *impatience of protracted inquiry*.—Such minds cannot bear anything that requires close and long-sustained attention. They become uneasy, fretted, and fidgetty; and are ever anxious to catch at any occasion for cutting the matter short and being done with it.

2. The *sympathy of passion with one or other of the parties*.—One of them happens to be their friend; and whether it be he or his adversary that makes the statement, partiality for him stirs their resentment at the injury done to him; the blood warms; and, passion thus striking in, they hastily interrupt the narration—will hear no more of it,—and at once proceed to load the enemy of their friend with abuse and imprecation. They *know* their friend, and to them it is enough that *he* has been a sufferer; they take it for granted that *he must* be in the right.

3. *Indolence—indisposition to be troubled*.—This is a temper the very opposite of the first, but producing a similar effect. The former jumped to a conclusion from over-eagerness; this comes soon to a close from sheer sluggishness of mind. It is to a man of this stagnant and lazy temperament an exertion quite unbearable to keep his mind so long on the stretch, as to listen even to a statement, and still more to an argument or pleading, that cannot be finished in a breath and done with. His attention soon flags; he gets sick of it; he seems as if he were listening, when he is not, and with a yawn of exhaustion and misery, he pronounces his verdict, and at times with great decision, for no other purpose than to get quit of the trouble. He can stand it no longer.

4. *Self-conceit*—the *affectation of extraordinary acuteness*.—This would be an amusing character, were it not, at the same time, so provoking. The self-conceited man assumes a very sagacious and penetrating look:—sits down with apparent determination to hear out the cause on both sides, and to “judge righteous judgment.” But it is hardly well begun, when the self-conceited man sees to the end of it. He starts up; his countenance beams with self-satisfaction; he throws aside the pen with which he had begun to take careful memoranda:—“Not the smallest need to go any farther—the case is clear as day—not a doubt about it—settled beyond a question—it is *so*, and *so*, and *so*.” And the same is the case in all matters of controversy. You can’t get leisure to state your argument. Whether it be favourable or unfavourable,—on the one side or on the other,—this man of wondrous penetration sees it all in an instant, as if by intuition; and he springs to the inference and to the answer, before you have well entered on your premises; or each argument in succession he catches out of your mouth, and finishes for you. It is surprising with what agility this spirit of self-conceit gets over difficulties. It sees none—no, never.

“Where others toil with philosophic force,
Its nimble nonsense takes a shorter course;
Flings at your head conviction in the lump,
And gains remote conclusions at a jump.”

Did I say that this self-conceit *never* sees difficulties?—I was wrong. There is one case in which it is very likely, almost sure to see them. I mean, *when others can’t*. Ah! then, it looks very grave, and shakes its head, and with oracular foresight, discerns a thousand—ay, and great and serious ones too.

“Be not ye,” my brethren, thus “wise in your own conceits:” for “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.” It is “*folly*,” from whichever of these or of other causes it proceeds. And it is no less “*shame*.” Many a time does it bring a man to shame, and cover him with confusion. In not a few cases, it is

twenty to one if he hit upon the truth. And perhaps there can be few better ways to expose the folly and punish the presumption, than to allow the man to go on to his close; and then, when he is in the full flush and triumph of self-complacency, to point out to him calmly how completely he has mistaken and misjudged the case. At any rate, such treatment is well merited on *his* part, if it can only be inflicted (which is not perhaps easy) in a right spirit on *ours*.

Verse 14. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?"—When "the spirit" is fresh and vigorous, bodily infirmities, and even pains of the severest description, may be endured with a great measure of composure by *natural fortitude* alone: how much more when it is enlivened and sustained in energy by the grace of the gospel! There is no saying what degree of bodily suffering may be borne without shrinking, by a mind in the full action of its powers and principles, and animated by divine influences. What have Christians, sinking to death under diseases the most agonizing, endured with smiling patience!—and what have martyrs submitted to with cheerfulness, in the dungeon, on the rack, on the scaffold, at the stake!—But when "*the spirit*" *itself* is "wounded"—when *it* is pierced and tortured, the bodily frame is shaken thereby to weakness and to the dust.

And what is "a *wounded spirit*?" The designation may be applied to the soul in various conditions. "The spirit" may be wounded, for example,—deeply, sorely wounded—by *disappointed hopes*;—especially when these hopes have rested on the attachment of a friend or friends, in whose faithfulness and love we have trusted, but by whom our confidence has been betrayed, and whose pledged affection has misgiven us:—when "our own familiar friend, who did eat of our bread, hath lifted up his heel against us:"—when the bosom on which we leaned and reposed proves false and treacherous:—when we find ourselves left alone, when most we required the sympathy, the counsel, and the aid of faithful friendship;—when we are "deserted at our utmost need" by those to whom we had looked with all the security of

an undoubting reliance:—when, it may be, those who are “bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh,” instead of dividing our sorrows and doubling our joys by fond and faithful participation, are cooled, alienated, estranged from us. O this, to such as may have experienced it, or may ever experience it, must be anguish itself. Well may we say, “*Who can bear it?*”—The tortures of the joint-dislocating and bone-breaking wheel are not to be compared with the agony of a spirit *thus* wounded. To bear *well*—that is, to bear with right principle and in a right manner, even bodily and other providential inflictions, requires more than mere natural fortitude:—and to bear well the agony of “a wounded spirit,” requires a measure still larger of the gracious influences of God’s Holy Spirit,—and all the power of promise and of hope.

The words may also be applied to a *wounded conscience*,—a conscience pierced through with the arrows of a thousand convictions,—stung with self-accusations,—agitated, through the discovery of the spiritual and heart-searching character of the divine law, with the “fearful looking-for of judgment.”—A “*good conscience*” is one of the firmest supports under the heaviest ills of life. It was amidst his sufferings from severe persecution, that Paul felt its preciousness. It was his “rejoicing.” But—a true believer, enjoying reconciliation and peace with God through Jesus Christ, and “exercising himself to have always a conscience void of offence”—O how different his case, even when alive to a sense of many failings, from that of the poor sinner with unrepented, unconfessed, undeplored, unforgiven guilt lying upon his conscience,—and that conscience quickened to action—roused to its fearful functions—by the “*fiery law*.” This is intolerable anguish. *This* form of the “wounded spirit who can bear?”*

By this desperate state of spirit, men are sometimes driven to conduct the most infatuated—and to the most fearful of all extremities—*suicide itself*; by which they seek refuge from the pangs of earth in the severer pangs of hell. This

* Psal. xxxii. 3, 4; xxxviii. 1—3.

is one of the forms of that "sorrow of the world which worketh death."

The only cure for a wounded conscience is the blood of atonement—of the divinely provided, the divinely accepted, the divine atonement. There is no other way of true and, in the end, satisfactory deliverance from this deepest and most excruciating of all the wounds of the mind. It is a wound which cannot be borne, but in one or other of two ways. Either the conscience must be seared into hardness by familiarity with sin—drugged into insensibility by its intoxicating cup, (the most fearful curse under the form of a present relief which can ever, in the judicial vengeance of heaven, fall upon any sinner on earth,) or it must be divinely pacified by faith in the atoning Saviour. The wound is one which no influence of God's Spirit can ever be imparted to *enable a man to bear*. The Holy Spirit is given to *deliver from it*, not to sustain under it. And this He does by "taking of the things that are Christ's, and showing them" to the mind of the conscience-stricken and spirit-wounded sinner, leading him to "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Groaning under the load of his sins, which have become a burden too heavy for him to bear, —smarting in anguish with the stings of an awakened and busy conscience,—overwhelmed with the "fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation"—the trembling sinner comes to the cross,—comes to it, under the gracious guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is there—"looking on Him whom *he* has pierced"—that he finds his effectual cure; there, that his wounded spirit is healed:—

"We sing a note that far transcends
The highest angel's highest strain:—
They never knew the pang that rends—
Nor felt the grace that heals the pain."

With what exquisite and touching pathos does the Christian Author of the Task—drawing from his own experience,—describe the anguish of "a wounded spirit," and the efficient means of cure!—

“ I was a stricken deer, that left the herd
 Long since:—with many an arrow deep infix'd,
 My panting side was charged when I withdrew,
 To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
 There was I found by One who had himself
 Been hurt by th' archers. In his side he bore,
 And in his hands and feet the cruel scars.
 With gentle force soliciting the darts,
 He drew them forth, and heal'd, and bade me live!”

O my hearers, if a wounded conscience—a sense of guilt in the soul—is thus ill to be borne *here*; what will be the sufferings of the “wounded spirit” in the world to come!—where there will be no pleasures of sin to alleviate or to sear it!—when it will be excited to the keenest sensibility, and its arrows will be dipped in the venom at once of memory and hopeless anticipation!—when the spirit shall be “pierced through with many sorrows,” and sorrows for which no softening and no cure shall ever be provided;—“no balm” in the place of final woe,—“no physician *there*!” “Their worm dieth not.”

If such be the agony of a thoroughly awakened and sensitive conscience—will you think me cruel in expressing the wish and the prayer that every conscience in this assembly *were* thus awakened—thus endowed with sensibility?—Ah! my friends, the wish is as far as possible from being a cruel one. I wish your consciences awakened *now*, while you are within reach of healing; while you have access to the balm and to the physician. *Now* the cure is to be found. Now, peace and hope are attainable. The blood that cleanseth from all sin, will heal the very deepest, fiercest, and most agonizing wounds of the spirit. If a conscience awakened and armed with its torturing sting is fearful,—still more fearful, and more ominous of future misery, is a conscience seared and insensible. *This* is not peace; it is stupor; it is the sleep of death; it is the appalling prelude to death eternal!

LECTURE LI.

PROV. XVIII. 15—19.

“The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge. A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men. He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him. The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty. A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.”

“THE *heart*” is here, as in many other instances, apparently used for *the mind* in general,—including both the intellect and the affections. There is, in “the wise,” a love of knowledge; and an application of the mental powers for its attainment. And as “*the ear*” is one of the great inlets to instruction, it may here, with propriety, be considered as comprehending all the ways in which knowledge may be acquired. “The ear” of “the wise” listens with interested and eager attention, when instruction of any valuable kind is imparted; and as “the ear *trieth words*,” he hears with discrimination,—desirous to distinguish truth from error, that the latter may be rejected, and the former stored up in his memory, and retained for use. “The wise” appreciates knowledge according to its *utility*, and never loses sight of its practical application. It is his desire that his whole character may be formed by the truth which he receives from the divine record. The Psalmist expresses the “wisdom of the wise,” in this respect, when he says—“Thy word have I hid in my heart, *that I sin not against thee.*”

Verse 16. "A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men."*

Some would render, instead of "*maketh room*," "*maketh enlargement*," that is, procures release and liberty. On this principle the governor Felix acted toward the Apostle Paul, eager for the gratification of his own avaricious disposition.† His was a basely sordid and unprincipled expectation. Alas! that a feeling so mean and despicable as well as profligate should be so common, under one form or another!—How often does it happen, that, when a man is unknown as to his rank and condition,—however fair and worthy his suit may be,—all is distance, and reserve,—all cold repulsiveness; and recourse is had to any pretext whatever in order to get rid of him;—but when afterwards, his station and wealth are discovered, and he is found to be a man who has a good deal in his power,—from whom something may be expected;—O what a change!—how many apologies, and regrets, and thousands of excuses!—what altered looks and manner! what obsequiousness, politeness, and courtesy! what cringing, what flattery! He who before refused a look or word of ordinary civility, would now go to the ends of the earth to serve one so worthy! nothing too great or too good to be done for him! all at his command!—Shame on our fallen nature! He who can thus basely stoop from the manly dignity of independence; and, instead of taking his ground in *character alone*,—in the realities of substantial excellence,—can condescend to accept of civilities and honours and tokens of respect, paid him solely for his conferred or expected gifts,—is, if possible, even more contemptible than he by whom those gifts are received. The "*great men*" are little men, into whose presence "a gift" obtains admission, when sterling worth would fail of finding it. And when there is any *principle* involved, and the gift comes for the purpose of bribing that principle out of the way of access,—it ought to be, and by every man of right character it will be, rejected with honest indignation—an indignation that

* Compare chap. xvii. 8; xix. 6.

† Acts xxiv. 26.

blushes at being thought capable of such disgraceful and criminal pliancy. It will be thus rejected, independently of what the world may say; but a regard to character will, at the same time, concur, with a regard to principle, in commanding its rejection; for even were the giver of the gift to gain his plea fairly, independently of his bribe,—to the bribe the success would be imputed,—and the fairness of the decision in itself would be considered as only accidental and fortunate,—the “gift” ensuring the sentence, let the merits of the case be what they may. He who makes his way by “gifts” *deserves* to be disappointed:—and he is truly honourable, and proves himself worthy of implicit confidence, and of the happy results of such a character, who, under the dominant power of principle, scorns and repudiates the “gift,” how valuable soever it may be, and *does* disappoint him.

O! my hearers, remember, every one of you—that there is ONE to whom no gift of yours can introduce you,—with whom nothing you can ever have it in your power to offer can obtain you favour,—and yet an introduction to whom, and the attainment of whose favour, is to each one of you of infinite value. There is no offering that can “make way for you” to the presence of the GOD OF HEAVEN. Could you pour at his feet the treasures of all worlds, you would be giving him only what was *his own*. Yet, there is a way made for you:—not by any gift of yours,—but by the gift for you of HIMSELF—by the divine Mediator. If you approach in *that* way to the God of salvation, you may come fearlessly to His very seat; and you will find it a mercy-seat; you will have a sure acceptance and a gracious welcome, both now and in the great day.

Verse 17. “He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.”—We have, in this verse, another evidence of the identity of human nature in all times and places. There are different causes of the pleasure we derive from particular *sayings*. Sometimes it arises from its profoundness and originality; while at other times it springs from its very striking conformity with every-day fact, and the pithy brevity and

terseness with which that is put into words which has so frequently been marked, in every one's own experience—with which that is *said*, which every one has *seen*. The latter is the description under which comes the case before us. Every day is the proverb verified; and in a variety of ways:

1. He who comes first may give a statement which, in some of its particulars, is *false*—*contrary* to the actual facts of the case. The falsehood of these particulars may not be detected. The story, as told, may hang well together, being made to wear a very imposing verisimilitude. It may look so like truth, from its very consistency, that its plausibility may almost force belief. But "*his neighbour comes*." He detects and exposes what is untrue in the statement, and so gives the account an entirely new and different aspect.

2. The statement may in no particular be false; but it may be *partial*;—the truth being told, but not the *whole* truth. Now, it is wonderful, how the leaving out of a single circumstance, and one, perhaps, that appears in itself trivial, often affects an entire narrative, altering its whole complexion. The "*neighbour comes*;" he introduces what had been concealed, and startles you by a surprisingly new view of the matter. The insertion, in its appropriate place, of the omitted fact constrains the instant exclamation—"Ah! that is very different—quite another thing!"

3. There may be *additions* as well as omissions. Some new circumstance may be left out by the one, which is not to be found in the account of the other. The "*neighbour*" that "*comes and searches*," finds this addition, and throws it out,—and so produces as thorough a change as, in the former case, was produced by inserting what had been omitted.

4. There may be *nothing false*, and nothing *partial*—that is, all the particulars may be introduced, all the facts told,—and neither may there be any *additions*;—but they may be arranged, connected, and coloured, in different ways. In one way of telling the story, prominence is given to some particular, which in the other account is indeed introduced, but is represented as of little moment, and thrown very much into the shade. In the different statements, this is before

that, and that is before this:—and you can readily conceive how the inversion of the order of facts, and of their relative positions in regard to each other, their mutual dependencies and casual relations, may produce two stories essentially different.

The effect produced in this way on a *narration* may be illustrated from the effect produced by *grouping* in a *picture*. The very same set of objects may be in two different paintings; but by their different arrangement or collocation,—an object being in the foreground of the one, large and distinct, which, in the other, is thrown far back into the distance, diminutive and hardly visible; while some other object, which was in the shade of diminutiveness, is brought forward into magnitude and prominence,—two pictures may be produced as different as possible in appearance and effect. The same thing might be illustrated from the different and even opposite sentiments which may be brought out by changing the collocation of the same set of words;—and by the difference too of effect produced, without any change in the arrangement of the words, by a change in the *emphasis* from one word to another.

The colouring and grouping of the facts of the same story may be the result of an intention to deceive and to produce a false impression. Yet it is wonderful to what an extent it may arise, almost unconsciously, from the secret influence of self-love, which really makes the very same things appear widely different, in their relative bearings and comparative importance, to ourselves, from what they do to another;—even to a neutral party—far more to an adversary. It has become proverbial, that *there are always two sides to a story*.

Let us see, then, what are the *lessons of practice*, deducible from this: for we do nothing to purpose, when we merely attend to the fact, as one of the characteristics of human nature. There are lessons for *parties in a cause*, and lessons for *those who may be called to decide between them*. As to the *parties*, then—let them learn, in the first place, not to be too easily, hastily, touchily displeased and irritated by each

other's statements; but mutually to make allowance for the natural tendencies of self-regard to make the best of a case for *self*, when there is no actual falsehood or obviously intentional mis-statement of facts.—Let them further learn to avoid being unreasonably dissatisfied with those who hesitate, or even refuse, to decide upon *their single statement*; remembering the tendency just noticed to favour self, and how hard they would esteem it, were the cause to be decided on the single representation of the other party. Let them apply, in this as in other cases, the great general law of equity and love.

As to others,—especially when called to form a judgment between parties,—let them learn to maintain a rigid and determined adherence to the rule of *hearing both sides before deciding*. The rule should be regarded as indispensable, even in the ordinary occurrences of everyday life:—and it is of special importance in exercising the functions of judges, jurymen, arbitrators, and members of churches in cases of discipline. The judgment should be kept entirely in suspense, till both sides have been fully heard. The *first* may “*seem right*,” but we must not allow—not only our lips to pronounce any decision, but even our minds to be prepossessed by his statement, till we have called in “his neighbour” to “search him.” Not even the representation of the dearest, the most confidential, upright, and best-principled friend on earth should be taken at once, and without a hearing of the other party. As *self* makes the very same things appear to the opposite parties in different lights; as they see them with different eyes, and through different mediums,—how under these different impressions, can their statements fail, though both are ever so conscientious, to make correspondingly different impressions on others? We may frequently have cause to say, even to the friend in whose integrity we place the most unbounded confidence, Really, dear friend, you have taken too strong a view of this matter:—the thing does not seem to us to have been done or said in the spirit in which it *appeared to you* to have been; nor can we regard it as in itself possessing anything like the importance

you ascribe to it, or calculated to produce the consequences you apprehend from it.

We ought not to allow ourselves to be driven from a strict adherence to this rule by any offence which either party, that happens to come first, may be disposed to take at his statement not being at once and unqualifiedly accepted. If persons *will* be unreasonable, we cannot help it. We may endeavour to show them that we are not suspecting at all their veracity; but, whether we succeed or not, we must abide by our rule. Every man of sound sense and right principle will be satisfied, on reflection, with the necessity of an unswerving adherence to it; from which he will feel, that he has no more right to insist on *his* being an exception, than another has. We are not commanded to have the same confidence in the representations of one as in those of another. Difference of known character may put this quite out of the question. But in all cases, *Hear both sides* must be our rule; and the longer we live, we shall feel the duty the more imperative of holding to it with unfailing constancy.

The subject of next verse we considered in a former lecture:—"The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty." As the lot was had recourse to when causes were such as admitted not of determination otherwise, there seems to be a natural enough relation of suggestion between this verse and the preceding. In cases when representations differed, and the evidence between them was such as to leave it impossible to say certainly on which side was the preponderance; or when the parties would not submit to arbitration; or when they were too powerful to be safely meddled with;—then "the lot caused contentions to cease, and parted between the mighty."

Perhaps it might not be amiss if "wars and fightings," from which such an amount of misery and all evil is ever arising, were to be prevented in a similar way, both between individuals and nations: unless—as arbitration ought to be resorted to by individuals, when they cannot come to an

agreement themselves—there might be instituted, on the principles of national honour and good faith, some great general tribunal of appeal for the countries and governments of Europe, whose decision, in cases of international differences, should, by mutual convention, be binding, and to which such differences might be referred.

I must not leave this subject without an additional remark or two, especially to my younger hearers. I formerly offered a few observations on "*chance games*," in connexion with this subject. These, I have some reason to think, have not, in some quarters, been rightly understood. I have been represented as *not condemning* such games. Now, if I heard of a youth saying, in these terms or in the spirit of them—"Oh! the minister tells us that cards are not the devil's books they have been called; that there is, after all, no harm in them,"—I should tremble for that youth. I should fear he had contracted, or is in course of contracting, a liking for such play. Should the simple expression of a sentiment respecting the abstract evil of "games of chance" *as such*, take off from his mind any portion of the salutary restraint which I am anxious he should feel, bitterly should I mourn his delusion. Let such a youth recollect, that they have deceived and ruined many a precious soul; that they have dissipated many a fortune, and turned, in ten thousand instances, plenty to beggary, freedom to a jail, life, health and vigour to emaciation and the grave; that they *are* marks of a worldly character; that they *do* stir up the worst passions of the heart; and that they have covered many a fair character with infamy:—and let him tremble when he ventures on such ground. O beware of beginnings! You only show inexperience, and ignorance of yourselves, if you fancy you are sure of never going beyond a given limit. Small stakes lead to greater. Losses themselves seduce onward by the hope of retrieving. The meshes of the net entangle the feet more and more inextricably. Temptation presses on temptation. Dishonesty, and pilfering, and mayhap forgery, supplies the exhausted purse. The horrors of an evil conscience are drowned in intemperance

and dissipation. The conscience becomes seared. Health gives way. Character and confidence and credit are lost. Phrenzy tempts to self-destruction, or the body pines to the dust, and the soul sinks into perdition.—Who are they, let me ask you, among the young people you know, that indulge in play—in the various species of gambling? Are they the sober, the virtuous, the godly? or are they the idle, the dissipated, the profligate, the worldly, the reckless of God and of eternity? The youth who joins himself to such, or who begins to look favourably on any of their ways—is in imminent peril. He is on the verge of a precipice. He is on the way, it may be, to the gaming-table and to hell. Let him start and turn, ere it be too late,—as he values his everlasting happiness. And I affectionately beseech you, let not your perdition, by your misunderstanding or perverting any sentiment of mine, be traceable, even were it but as the innocent occasion, *to me!*

Verse 19. “A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city; and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.”—The word *offended* signifies here, evidently, *provoked, roused to resentment*. And the words imply, that when a brother *is* thus offended, the resentment is more violent, and the reconciliation more hard to be effected, than where the difference is with a stranger. And so it is whether the offence be *without* just ground, or *with* it. I might refer to the cases of Cain and Abel; of Joseph and his brethren; of Absalom and Amnon; of Esau and Jacob. In each of these cases, nothing short of *death* was plotted and resolved.—The verse seems to point chiefly to cases of offence *given*; and the words contain a caution against *offending*, as well as against *being offended*. It is supposed, however, that offence has actually been *taken* as well as *given*. Unbrotherly conduct;—ungrateful returns for favours bestowed,—for efforts and sacrifices made, to promote a brother's interests; a course perhaps of provocation long borne with,—the irritating and offensive conduct often passed over, and as often repeated,—has led at last to a rupture: patience and forbearance have been worn out, and anger and aliena-

tion substituted for long-suffering affection. "A brother" thus "offended is harder to be won than a strong city; and their contentions are like the bars of a castle."

The *matter of fact* is here stated—and there are natural enough reasons to account for it. More is justly expected from a brother than from a stranger—more of affection, gratitude, kindly treatment, fidelity and trustworthiness. When such expectations are disappointed, the wound in the spirit is proportionally deeper, and more difficult of healing,—the breach wider, and harder of being made up. Besides, the slower a person is to take offence,—the longer he forbears,—the more he forgives,—the more difficult it is fairly to overcome the yearnings of affection, and break the bonds of brotherhood,—the more inveterate may the spirit of resentment be; the more sullen and distant the alienation, when it is actually produced. The offended brother *cannot get the better of it*. He broods over it;—and the more he broods, the more he feels. The more he reflects on the offender's violated obligations, the more aggravated does his culpability appear. He looks, and justly, for acknowledgment; while the offender, possibly, thinks the less, instead of the more, of his offence, because it is only a brother against whom it has been committed, and is apt to expect forgiveness *without* acknowledgment. Thus, on both sides, there is too much of stern unbending pride; and continued distance widens more and more, instead of diminishing.

Persons are in danger of taking undue advantage of their near relationships, and of using unaccountable liberties;—of forming and cherishing the most extravagant expectations, insisting on their fulfilment, and absurdly and pertinaciously resenting their refusal;—of doing to a brother what they never would think of doing to another person. They forget, that to use a brother ill is *worse* than the same ill-usage to a stranger. It is strongly felt to be so; and when mutual alienation has actually taken place; when brother has *cut* brother; when intercourse is suspended,—their doors respectively closed against each other; and when, if they have families, these make the quarrel their own, each taking part with

him whom they regard as their injured husband and parent;—the spectacle is indeed a sad one. And, as each, instead of feeling the duty of himself giving in, or being the first to attempt a reconciliation, looks for the first step from the other side, and cannot bring himself down to make the first advances, (O false and unworthy pride!) the castle-bars remain undrawn; and, rusting in their hold, become more and more difficult to force open:—and the unseemly contentions—the unhappy and mischievous feuds—pass down from generation to generation!

It is not always thus. The grace of God ought, in all its subjects, to prevent such breaches; and, if unhappily they have at any time taken place, it should have power to heal the wounds, to draw heart again to heart,—to unfasten “the bars,” and open the gates of mutual reconciliation:—“The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated.”

Christians are brethren. They are members of one family. It becomes them to love and live as brethren; to be slow to give, and slow to take, offence; to be humble, and ready to pardon; to delight in reconciliation and peace themselves, and in successfully mediating, and making peace between others. The gospel is the gospel of peace; of love; of forgiveness; of harmony between God and men, and between all who are reconciled to God and to one another through the blood of the covenant. *Their* “bars” should be those which shut out causes of offence, and will give no admission to the demons of discord. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore!” Ps. cxxxiii.

LECTURE LII.

PROV. XVIII. 20—24.

“A man’s belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; and with the increase of his lips shall he be filled. Death and life are in the power of the tongue; and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof. Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord. The poor useth entreaties: but the rich answereth roughly. A man that hath friends must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.”

It is evident that in this passage “the *fruit of the mouth*,” and “the *increase of the lips*,” mean the same thing—namely, *that which the mouth and the lips utter*,—the nature of their customary communications. And the general sentiment conveyed by both clauses of the twentieth verse is, that the effects, or results, will correspond with the *kind* of “fruit” thus produced; or, in other words, with the general style and character of a man’s conversation. It shall be so amongst men—in the intercourse of social life:—a man will be respected according to the wisdom, trusted according to the truth, beloved according to the sweetness and benevolence, of “the fruit of his mouth;” whereas foolish talk will procure contempt; the utterance of falsehood distrust; harsh, austere, and haughty words dislike and aversion.

There is a sense in which we may understand the language, even taking the former clause of the twentieth verse *literally*—“A man’s *belly* shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth.” You may smile and say, A man cannot live upon words! Very true. But the way in which a man uses his lips and his tongue, as the organs of speech, may contribute not a little to his getting, or his failing to get,

“the meat that perisheth.” I mean not that any of you should, in the slightest degree, try to work your way in life by words of flattery: but when a man’s general conversation is such as to procure for him a character for discretion, courtesy, gratitude, straightforward integrity and trustworthiness,—this may surely contribute, eminently and directly, to the temporal sustenance and comfort of the man himself and his family: while an opposite style of intercourse may tend to penury and starvation. A man may, in various ways, make his “lips” the instrument of either want on the one hand, or plenty on the other.

It must have been observed, however, by careful readers of the Bible, that *the belly* sometimes stands for *the inward parts*—the mind, the conscience, the heart; just as the *bowels* do for the *compassionate sympathies*.* In this verse, then, the words may mean that a man’s *inward satisfaction* or the contrary, shall arise from “the fruit of his mouth.” His conscience shall have peace,—his heart true enjoyment. According to the excellence of a man’s words—according as they tend to righteousness or unrighteousness, to good or evil, to the glory of God or his dishonour,—will be the inward satisfaction or the inward bitterness of spirit with which the man is “*filled* :”—with which he is filled now, and with which he shall be filled for ever.† In this highest sense, then, “death and life are in the power of the tongue.” The dutiful, or the wayward and rebellious use of it may tell effectually on the “death” or the “life” of eternity.—The words, at the same time, are strikingly true as to the effects of the tongue *upon others*. One word of perjury or falsehood may consign an innocent man to “death,” or obtain unmerited “life” to one who is guilty:—so too, in different circumstances, may one word of truth. One word of slander may go far to break a sensitive man’s heart, and send him pining to the grave;—while one word of comfort and merited

* See, among various examples, chap. xx. 27. The belly is evidently the whole *inner man*:—John vii. 38. “Out of his belly” means simply *from within*.

† See Matt. xii. 33—37.

commendation may bring up and cheer into new life the sinking spirit of despondency. And so all the intermediate stages, between the full sweetness of life and the wormwood bitterness of death, are capable of being affected, to a large extent, by "*the tongue*."

What has been applied to the testimony of a witness,—to the verdict of a jury,—to the sentence of a judge,—bears a still higher and stronger application to the preaching of *error* and of *truth*. Well may it be said *here*, that "*death and life are in the power of the tongue*." According as it gives utterance to the one or to the other, it may send souls to hell or to heaven,—sealing them in spiritual "death," or quickening them to spiritual "life." Oh! how solicitous should this consideration make public teachers to be sure that their lips utter nothing but the truth of God; what shall be "for edification and not for destruction,"—for "life," and not for "death!"

The latter clause of the twenty-first verse is somewhat ambiguous:—"And they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof."—By one translator the words are rendered—"They who *indulge* it." If this be the kind of "*love*" that is meant, then the *indulgence* of the tongue is probably, we may almost say certainly, intended for its *evil* indulgence; its natural tendency, according to Solomon, being to evil, and requiring constant vigilance and restraint.—We may remark, however, that *love* operates in two ways—*wisely* and *foolishly*. Thus it is with parents. He who loves his children wisely, will *restrain* them; he who loves them foolishly, will *indulge* them. If we only take the love of the tongue in a similar way, we shall have again the two opposite descriptions of results. The *wise* love of the tongue will lay it ever under salutary restraint,—withholding it, by a firm coercion, from the utterance of what is evil, and would recoil in mischief on itself and its owner:—the *foolish* love of the tongue will give it unbridled license,—allowing it, like a spoiled child, to have all its own way: and according to the one course or the other, will the fruits be sweet or bitter,—life-giving or deadly. (James iii. 5—10.)

Verse 22. "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord." Nothing can be more manifest than that this cannot be meant indiscriminately of all who may happen to sustain the relation. In the Septuagint we have it *a good wife*. The Vulgate has the same supplement, though the form of expression varies. So also in the Syriac.—Matthew Henry says "a *bad* wife does not deserve to be called by a name of so much honour." The wife meant is evidently such a one as answers to the design of the original institution of the marriage relation, and is a "helpmeet" for her husband.* It is such a wife as Solomon himself describes in the last chapter of this book, —where he gives her full-length portraiture. And he there represents the character as one that is far from being very easily found,—a precious jewel, and precious by its very rarity. Observe—

1. We may regard the words as associated in Solomon's mind with the wretched and ruinous tendency of that sin which is so strongly condemned, and against which the rising youth are so emphatically, so repeatedly, and so affectionately warned.† Of how many thousands and tens of thousands has that sin been the temptation and the destruction! Blessed, then—blessed of God—is he who escapes the snare; who gives his heart to one object of virtuous and fond attachment; whom such early affection and conjugal union are the means of saving from temptation, vice, and ruin; who "lives joyfully with the wife of his youth;" who "drinks water out of his own cistern, and springing water out of his own well;" who, contemning the maxims of a vain world, which would demand a style of starting in life beyond his means, resolves, with the prudent partner of his heart's choice, to set out happily together, in the spirit of contented moderation! Where there are the means at all of anything like comfortable subsistence, there is not a more desirable preservative from personal and diffusive vice, than *early wedlock*.

* Gen. ii. 18, 21—24.

† Chap. v 7—13.

2. Solomon, you will observe, recognizes here the original law of marriage. He speaks of *one wife*, and *only one*. He had, in this point, grievously transgressed himself. Had Solomon "found a wife," instead of crowding a seraglio with hundreds, he would have experienced the truth of his own saying—he would have "found a good thing, and have obtained favour of the Lord." By acting otherwise, in "the days of his vanity," he was led fearfully astray; his "heart departed from the Lord;" and the Lord withdrew His favour from him, and raised up against him the agents of His avenging jealousy. It was, moreover, by the course which he pursued that he failed to find the "*good thing*" which he here commends,—a wife that could make him happy. Mark the record of his experience—"One man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found." Was it any wonder? No, verily. He took the worst way possible to find a virtuous, worthy, female character. What woman of reputation would choose to be found in such company?

I believe every departure from the original law, without exception, by whomsoever practised, was sinful; and in all cases, the fruits were bitter. Patriarchs, and judges, and kings broke the law; and good men and bad alike suffered for it. Jesus, in instituting the Christian law on this subject, only re-affirms what was the law from the beginning. And it is only when that law is attended to, and the union of two hearts maintained with the devotedness of conjugal fidelity, that the full meaning of the verse before us can ever be experienced.

3. Such being the law of God,—and the laws of European countries being in harmony with it,—few things are more wonderful than the reckless inconsideration with which the choice is often made of a *partner for life*. How little consideration is there, in multitudes of cases, of what is so essential to social happiness, congruity of principles, of tempers and dispositions, of objects of pursuit and sources of enjoyment! In how many instances is it the *purse* that is wedded, not the *person*!—in how many the person, merely as

respects bodily appearance, not mental or moral character!—and in how many is it a rash and heedless risk, independently of all serious attention to character or grounds of promise for future concord and happiness; or, if there is anything that seems ominous of the contrary, a self-flattering assurance that it will be done away afterwards! Marriage was the institution of a kind and benevolent God. It was meant for the happiness of His creatures. When formed and maintained on right principles, it answers, in an eminent degree, its original intention. It is not the fault of the institute, nor of the God with whom it originated, that in any case it is *not* so formed; or that, when formed otherwise, it fails of yielding what it was meant to confer. I am fully persuaded that nineteen-twentieths of the failures complained of have their causes in the “unequal yokings” of the parties:—and for these, unless in cases of extraordinary previous simulation, who but the parties themselves are to blame?—And on this topic—

4. Let the duty be specially noticed, on the part of believers, that they marry “*in the Lord*.” I might trace the history of the conjugal relation from the beginning, and show you how mischievous and fatal, in regard to the spiritual character of individuals and communities of God’s professing people, has been the disregard of this restriction. I might show you, in a variety of particulars, both in regard to the parties themselves and to rising families, the reasonableness of the restriction. The law is expressly laid down in 1 Cor. vii. 39. The case, indeed, is of such a nature, that a law should not have been necessary. Christians might well have been expected to be, on such a subject, “a law unto themselves.” It ought to be a proposition of self-evident truth, that to a *believer*, an unbelieving wife, or an unbelieving husband, can never be “*a good thing* ;” and that for such a one to look for “favour of the Lord” in the very act of violating His will, is a very vain and a very presumptuous expectation. A wife may have all other qualifications a man can well desire; she may be wealthy, beautiful, well-connected, accomplished, prudent, and even in natural tem-

per amiable:—yet still, with all this, O what a want must be felt, when there is no coincidence of principle, of feeling, of desire, of pursuit, of prospect, on the most important and interesting of all subjects—no union of heart in spiritual affection, in prayer, in converse, in domestic education, and in the anticipations of hope! Such union ought to be regarded by all believers as primary and indispensable. At the same time, *in itself* it may not always be *enough*. There may be agreement in religious principles, while yet, in not a few points, there may be a want of congruity too great to render happiness very likely.

The choice ought, in all cases, to be a matter of very serious deliberation; and, with Christians, of earnest prayer. If a “prudent wife is from the Lord,” from the Lord should such a wife be sought. It is itself a favour from the Lord; and it brings His favour along with it. In every stage of such a union, it has the smile and the blessing of heaven. Few sights are more lovely, or more full of interest, than that of a youthful pair, setting out in life together,—united by the bond of virtuous, tender, and fervent love;—and their intercourse hallowed, sweetened, and beautified by the sacred influence of Christian piety; when the bond of grace is intertwined with that of nature, each adding its strength to the other. And then—what sight in the world more delightful, than that of a family, the result of such an union, —trained for God,—“brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,”—early manifesting the happy influence of religious instruction; all mutually affectionate, all cheerful, their hearts beating in unison in the sympathy of one another’s joys and sorrows; and all living in the pleasing though pensive hope, that though they must part on earth, they shall meet in heaven! This is indeed a sight on which the eye rests with beaming delight,—lovely as the very bowers of Eden,—grateful to the feelings as a garden of spices. And this too is “from the Lord,”—even the invaluable blessing—first in the list of all earthly joys,—the blessing of domestic happiness. (Ps. cxxviii.) Nor must we stop here. We must look to the *end* as well as the beginning.

Think of an aged pair, who have journeyed together through a long pilgrimage, sharing the joys and the sorrows of their common lot, and, by the sympathy of love, doubling the one and dividing the other,—“heirs together of the grace of life,”—bound together and mutually endeared by the faith of Christ and the hope of heaven! Their children have risen up, and call them blessed. And at the close of their long day of life, the shadows of the evening are gently lengthened out, and they sleep together in peace! How delightful to think of those who have been one in life, being one in death, and one for ever!—one even in that happy world, where they “neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.”—I would fain not reverse the picture;—but, as a further inducement to Christians to beware of all “unequal yoking with unbelievers,” affectionate faithfulness obliges me to add—how sad, how agonizing the thought of an eternal separation—of parting for ever! What a pang of unutterable anguish must that be, with which a man follows to the grave, and deposits there, the remains of one respecting whom he has no good reason to believe that she was united to Christ! With what a knell of agony must the sound of the shovelled earth come upon his heart, that covers from his sight “the desire of his eyes,” the companion of his life,—when the consolation of the “sure and certain hope” is a stranger to his bosom!—never again to meet, save only where the seal of eternity shall be put upon their separation!

Verse 23. “The poor useth entreaties: but the rich answereth roughly.”—This is one of those general sayings which express rather tendency and frequency than universality. There are many exceptions to both sides of the statement. The poor are sometimes insolent, and the rich gentle and kind. But, generally speaking, although pride belongs to our fallen nature, and is to be found in the poor as well as in the rich,—yet *necessity* is still stronger in its demands. The poor are fain to master their feelings of pride;—they must “*use entreaties*,”—and persist in using them, even amidst many refusals. The tendency of riches again, and their

too frequent effect, is, to engender in their possessors a feeling of superiority, a supercilious haughtiness, and a harshness of manner and of language to their inferiors. And I think it may be observed with truth, that the temptation to this is strongest, and the fact most frequently to be witnessed, in those who have risen, or are rising to affluence from comparative poverty. It is among that class that the greatest amount of that most pitiful of all principles is to be found—*purse-pride*. We have an instance at once of the humble, necessitous entreaty of the poor, and an instance of exception to the haughty roughness of the rich, in Ruth and in Boaz.* On the other hand, an example of purse-proud surliness is to be seen in the character of Nabal;† and we have the entreaty of felt dependence, and the harsh severity of lordly insolence, in the case of the oppressed Israelites and the merciless king of Egypt.‡—The rich are not here justified in treating with insolent roughness the entreaties of the poor. Far from it. The poor are entitled to sympathy and kindness, both in speech and in behaviour. It is enough that providence has visited them with privation, and the humiliation of dependence, without advantage being taken of their circumstances to crush the fallen, and add insult to suffering. There may be cases of poverty which require to be treated with firmness, and with steady refusal;—but not *on account of the poverty*, but of the character with which it is associated. There is a *manner* even of *giving* to the poor—of answering their entreaties by an alms,—which, to a mind of sensibility, (and the poor have their sensibilities as well as their betters in station) takes off half the value of the benefaction. The alms are given with a churlish rebuff; it is a “rough answer” after all. The very refusal of kindness—when circumstances necessitate it, may be far less offensive than the very alms of unfeeling and gratuitous rudeness.

In one sense, we are all poor—all dependent—having nothing that we can call our own. We must “use entreat-

* See Ruth ii. 7—13. † 1 Sam. xxv. 10, 11. ‡ Ex. v. 13—18.

ties." God has made this our duty. And when we come before Him, in the true spirit of dependence, and plead as He prescribes,—we may rest assured, we shall never be "answered roughly" there. The Proprietor of the universe "has respect unto the lowly;"—he is the friend and patron of the poor. "The poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless;" and no poor, dependent, suppliant does He ever "send empty away." He says to all, in the accents of inviting condescension and kindness—"Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." "The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him."—The rich should in this "*imitate God*." They are never so truly dignified, as when they treat those beneath them with kind and courteous affability, and make the poor, instead of cowering under their scowl, feel at ease in their presence; taking off the pain of dependence by the grace of generous benignity.

Verse 24. "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."—*Friends* are persons who, from congruity of character, are mutually attached to each other in close and benevolent intimacy. In this verse, the man is supposed to *have* friends: and it contains a *lesson* how to retain them, and a *motive* to so doing.

1. The *lesson* is one of *consistency*. Towards those whom we call by the endearing designation of *friends*, friendly dispositions must be shown in a corresponding behaviour. If the "man who has friends" treats those whom he so calls with coldness, reserve, and distance; and still more, if he goes beyond this, and adds neglect and selfish injury; he has nothing to expect but the forfeiture of friendship on their part. He constitutes himself unworthy of its blessings. He may complain of his friends having forsaken him; whereas he has no right of complaint. The cause is in himself; the fault his own. He has put them away—driven them off by wrong, or allowed them to drop off by neglect. And if, having thus lost them by his own fault when he did *not* feel his need of them, he comes afterwards to experience such need and to be sensible of the want of

them, who is to blame but himself? If those whom he has thus disfranchised from the obligations of friendship do then take compassion upon him,—feel the renewed yearnings of old attachment, and spontaneously offer their restored intimacy and kind services, they act nobly; but he has not to thank himself for it.—All friendships must, from their very nature, be, on both sides, voluntary; and founded not in circumstances or condition merely, but in character, in harmony of mind and heart, in reciprocal esteem and love. If a man, on rising in the world, makes those who before were his friends feel themselves inferiors and dependents, friendship is at an end. If they choose to resign the position of friends and to allow themselves to be regarded as pensioners, or as hangers-on upon his condescension,—they may. But if, with a becoming spirit of self-respect, they decline exchanging the equality of friendship for the position of obsequious debtors to a lofty condescension, the blame lies, not with them, but with him who has virtually discarded them. There are few things more wounding to the spirit than the failure of those who have called themselves our friends. We may bear long with their seeming neglect or inconsistent dealings,—finding excuses for them, and anxious to retain them. But there are limits to such good-natured forbearance; even to the charity which “believeth and hopeth *all* things.” “The man who has friends” *must*, if he would keep them, “show himself friendly.”—We have then—

2. A *motive* to the keeping of them: “*and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.*”—“The friend that sticketh closer than a brother,” has with many become a favourite designation of the Saviour—the blessed Jesus; so that they use it, as if, in the Bible, it had really been meant of *him*. Now, it is *true* of him; no designation could be more appropriate. He is “*the sinner’s friend.*” He expressly calls his people *friends*; and he founds the designation on the intimacy of his communications with them.* And in this relation he is constant and consistent

* John xv. 13—15.

—“the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever”—“whom he loves, loving unto the end,”—and in every step of his conduct towards them acting in uniform congruity with his character and the claims of the graciously assumed relation.

I need hardly say, however, that there is no such reference in the proverbial saying before us:—of which the obvious meaning is—that there have been friendships of which the bond has proved itself stronger and more tenacious than even that of natural affection. It has withstood the tuggings and wrenchings of severer trials of its strength and tenacity. Friends have remained fast in their friendship when brothers themselves have parted. This has especially been the case, when the friendship has been cemented by grace,—by the tie of a common faith, common sensibilities, and a common hope in matters of religion,—compared with other relations when *without* this bond. Such was the friendship, formerly adverted to, between David and Jonathan. It was, on Jonathan’s part, severely tried,—put to tests before which fraternal affection would, in many instances, have given way: but “Jonathan loved David even as his own soul;” and David, in his pathetic and touching lament over his friend “fallen in battle,” exclaims—“I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.”

The preciousness of such friendships has ever been felt, and has been the theme of story and of song. Life has been made a sacrifice on the altar of faithful friendship. It is unspeakably valuable;—to have a heart on which you can repose, with confidence of tender interest, your most secret solitudes and desires, and from which you receive a return of the same confiding love. What a support in trial!—what a stimulus in duty!—what a guide in difficulty!—what a solace in despondency!—what a zest and relish of every joy!

“Thy bounteous hand with worldly bliss
Hath made my cup run o’er;
And in a kind and faithful friend
Hath doubled all my store.”

If such be the sacredness, the intimacy, the pleasure, and the permanence, of true friendship;—with what gratitude should we bless the name of our gracious Lord, for having assumed this relation to his people!—"calling them friends!" He afforded the highest evidence that the designation was not with him a name without a meaning:—He "*gave his life* for his friends." And what is his promise to them now?—the promise of faithful friendship—of a love which "many waters could not quench, nor the floods drown?" It is one which comprehends in it all that they can wish—all that they can need:—"I will never leave thee; I will never forsake thee!" To have an interest in His friendship, is to be honoured and blessed indeed!

Let the feeling of *holy friendship* be mutually cultivated among the followers of "the friend of sinners,"—friendship, "not in word and tongue only, but in deed and in truth,"—friendship practical and self-denying. He who "gave his life for his friends" teaches those friends to be ready to give their lives for each other:—"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

O let all, if they would be truly and permanently happy, choose the friendship of Christ and of God, and cast in their lot with God's people. The right hand of divine friendship is held out to every one of you. The voice of the gospel—in the name of Him "in whom God reconciles the world unto himself" is—"Be ye reconciled unto God!"—and all God's people, with one heart and one soul, unite in saying to you—"Come with us, and we will do you good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."

LECTURE LIII.

PROV. XIX. 1--3.

‘ Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool. Also, that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good; and he that hasteth with his feet sinneth. The foolishness of man perverteth his way; and his heart fretteth against the Lord.’

THE *fool*, being here opposed, not only to him “that walketh in his integrity,” but to “*the poor*” that so walketh,—is evidently intended to be regarded as occupying a superior station—as *wealthy*. The sentiment, then, is, that the pious and upright poor man “is better” than the perverse and foolish rich man.

1. He “is better”—*as a man*. He is so, because more truly *estimable* and *honourable*. It should be a settled maxim—and with all that are wise it is—that *character* is the true dignity of man, and the want of it his true disgrace. He is to be estimated, not by what he *has*, but by what he *is*. That which is merely *extraneous* is *not the man*. Moral and spiritual excellence dignifies human nature, and ennobles the possessor of it, with whatever external condition it be found in union. An enlightened mind and a renewed heart are the true glory of our nature—“the best style of man:”—and the poorest, with these, is “better,” in real respectability and solid worth, than the richest without them.

He “is better,” also *as a man*, because more truly *happy*. He carries the constituent elements of happiness within him. They are, as it were, a part of himself. They cannot, therefore, be alienated. They are like the “treasures in heaven,”

which "no thieves can break through to steal." They lie in the heart, and no "stranger" can "intermeddle" with them. His inward peace and satisfaction, incomparably surpass, both as to intrinsic value and abiding security, all that wealth and rank and worldly honour can ever yield.

2. He is better—as *a member of society*. He is more *useful*, and therefore more valuable. The "perverse" and "foolish" exert an influence most pernicious and lamentable. The tendency of their example is to corruption and degradation; and thus to all that is fitted to prevent, instead of promoting true happiness. And the higher his station, and the more commanding his wealth, the contagion of his character becomes only the more diffusive and the more virulent. "Better"—far better, in this respect, "is the poor that walketh in his integrity"—diffusing around him, in the sphere in which his lot is cast, an antiseptic virtue, counteracting evil and promoting good. And, as the stability, prosperity, and happiness of a nation depend so much on the character of the *working classes*,—who form, as it were, the extended base of the social pyramid,—he is the best patriot who most effectually advances the knowledge, the religion, and the virtue of these classes;—who most effectually contributes to multiply the number of those who, in the lower departments of life, "walk in their integrity." The "perverse *lips*" and the perverse *life* of the unprincipled fool do incomparably more harm to society, than his wealth can ever do it good. An augmentation of wealth is not always, either to individuals or to nations, an augmentation of happiness. Too often has it proved the very reverse—the sapping and undermining of the individual's and the nation's well-being,—instability and downfall having many a time dated their commencement, and graduated their progress, from the entrance and accumulation of unwonted wealth and luxury.

Ye upright and godly poor, "hold fast your integrity!"—O let nothing prevail with you to forfeit your inward peace! Stoop not to the use of any means to better your situation, by which you would be deprived of *this*. How great soever your success, your loss would be far greater than your gain.

Poverty is no disparagement; dishonesty is. Cost, then, what it may, keep your character; keep your honour; keep your conscience; keep your assurance of God's love; keep your hope of God's glory. "Cast not away," for any earthly consideration, "your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward."

Verse 2. "Also, that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good; and he that hasteth with his feet sinneth."—The connexion of the two clauses of this verse has led critics to attach different senses to the word *knowledge* in the former, and has given rise to various translations, to convey what each has conceived to be the sense:—"It is not good for the soul to be without *caution*; for he that hasteth with his feet sinneth:"—"Quickness of action, without prudence of spirit, is not good; for he that hasteth with his feet sinneth:"—"Fervent zeal, without prudence, is not good; for he that hasteth with his feet sinneth:"—"Ignorance of one's-self is not good; and he that is hasty of foot sinneth."—These various free renderings (for such they are) express, respectively, correct sentiments,—truths, and truths of practical value. But there does not appear the least necessity for any alteration of the received version. It is quite sufficiently confirmed by experience, that the tendency, not of *self-ignorance* alone, but of *ignorance in general*, is to produce that "*hastiness of foot*"—that imprudent precipitation,—which the latter part of the verse associates with the commission of sin, as being its natural and frequent cause. The haste of ignorance or superficial knowledge, has marred many an experiment in science—deprived the world of its possibly valuable results; and has prompted to conduct which has laid up for the agent the bitterness of regret, the sighs of penitential sorrow.

Considered as a general maxim, the former clause of the verse is a very important one.—A "*soul*" is a rational and intelligent spirit:—and what is such a spirit "*without knowledge?*" It seems as if there were, in the supposed case, the absence of an essential property. It is reason, with nothing *on* which, and nothing *by* which reason can work;—intellect,

without what intellect is given to acquire;—powers, without instruments;—faculties, without means of putting them to profitable account;—mind, in destitution of that without which it might as well be matter. “*Knowledge*” is the soul’s very element,—in which alone it can “live and have its being.”

When man came, in his purity, from the creative hand of his Maker, his soul was put in possession *directly* of “knowledge.” This was the great *good* of his soul. It was capable of enjoying, and did enjoy—clearly and amply, we have every reason to believe, the best of all knowledge—the knowledge of God himself,—that wonderful Being from whom he had received his sensitive and his rational existence,—the infinite concentration of all greatness and all goodness, of all purity and of all love; and the knowledge of the works of God, as brought under his immediate or more remote cognizance; and of the character of God as manifested in them, to his observant and delighted mind;—those works on which, when they were finished, with man as their rational superintendent, and as God’s high-priest amongst them, to present to Him, on their behalf, the incense of their praise,—the eye of the Maker looked, and pronounced them all “very good.”

There was introduced by sin a description of knowledge which it had been for the soul’s good to have continued without—the *experimental knowledge of evil*. This was what man obtained by listening to the temptation which held out to him the deceitful promise of such an augmentation of knowledge as would place him, in a manner, on a parity with the Most High. Such was the temptation presented by the artful seducer. It was not,—as some malignant minds have alleged, and some weak minds have inconsiderately believed,—the *fruit*, but the *promised results* of the eating of it: “Ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil.” The temptation was thus no little, trivial, contemptible one, but one of the highest apparent excellence and worth. Man, however, was, by the experiment, a fearful loser. His moral dispositions became perverted and opposed to God,—and, in the things of God, his understanding became,

by this very means, obscured. "He did not *like* to retain God in his knowledge," and the knowledge of God was lost. This was emphatically "*not good*." And from that day to this, in every age and in every clime, has the truth of the words before us been sadly experienced.

There is *now* a "knowledge of God"—in the *same character* as before the fall, but manifested in a relation and in works more appropriate to man's fallen condition,—to which, with peculiar emphasis, the language must apply—the knowledge of God in the great work of redemption. This is *the* knowledge which it is the main design of revelation to impart. And what says *He* respecting it, who is himself the Word and Wisdom of God?—"This is LIFE ETERNAL, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."* O! can it, then, be "*good*" that the soul be without *this* knowledge? Let men of science say what they will, we *must* claim for it the very *first* place. Graduate, as you will, the scale of the comparative value of all other descriptions of knowledge, we demand the highest point for *this*. Though a human soul were able to embrace, and did embrace, the entire circle of knowledge comprehended in all its other departments,—yet, without *this* knowledge and its appropriate influence, it would have no more than the character of Satan, as expressed by a poet of our own, shortly but well—"Intellect without God."

Yet even to *general* knowledge may the words before us be applied. It is good;—and "that the soul be without it is *not good*." It gives better occupation to time; and, in various ways, contributes to fit its possessor for usefulness, preventing, both as to ourselves and others, that "*hasting with the feet*" which leads to sin. But still, even to render general knowledge truly available for a man's usefulness, in the highest sense and degree, it must be associated with the knowledge of God. To that it must all be subordinated,—and by that it must be hallowed. General knowledge must be *principled* by divine knowledge, and by it directed in its

* John xvii. 3.

application. Without right principle to guide the use of it, it may be (and in many instances, without question, it has been) only the means of enabling a man to be the cleverer villain,—endowing him with powers of evil,—with resources and arts of fraud and mischief. And, although I am very far from saying or thinking that, even without religion, this is always the effect of such knowledge,—yet it is a consideration which should put Christians on the alert, that, while means so various are in requisition for the diffusion of science and literature, there be efforts made to maintain a corresponding diffusion of valuable religious instruction; that so, as far as lies in them, the imparting of the *power* may be accompanied with the imparting of the *principle* that shall insure the right and beneficial use of it.

Verse 3. “The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the Lord.”—We have, in Scripture, many exemplifications of the state of mind which this verse describes. How frequently does it appear in the history of the dealings of Jehovah with Israel! To themselves—to their own folly and sin,—they owed all their judicial sufferings; yet how incessantly do they “fret against the Lord,” and throw the blame of them on Him!—saying in their impatient petulance, “The way of the Lord is not equal?” Even when, in serving idols, they were indebted to the patient and long-suffering forbearance of God for the good they continued to enjoy, they ungratefully, and in the spirit of fretful murmuring, impute this good to the false gods they were criminally worshipping! And at a later day—when, in consequence of their rejecting the Messiah, the judgments of God began to come down upon them,—how did they, to the very last, instead of humbly “accepting the punishment of their sins,” persist in “fretting against the Lord!”*—In Ahab, when he was reproved for letting Benhadad escape;† in Asa when he was wroth with the faithful seer who reproved him in the Lord’s name;‡ and in Jehoshaphat, in his treatment of Micaiah the son of Imla§—

* See 1 Thess. ii. 15, 16.

† 1 Kings xx. 42, 43.

‡ 2 Chron. xvi. 9, 10.

§ 2 Chron. xviii. 25, 26. with verse 7.

we have, as in many more, individual exemplifications of the spirit.

We shall endeavour to apply the principle of the verse to a few of its various manifestations, both in regard to *temporal*, and in regard to *spiritual* things.

In the former, the error reprehended is exceedingly common. We meet with it every day:—and alas! our own hearts are all sadly prone to it.

A man, for example, undertakes a business for which he is in no way qualified either by nature or by education, by talent, temper, or habit:—or he conducts the business which he *has* undertaken, with inconsiderate carelessness and indolent negligence:—or he adopts hasty and rash steps, on the suggestion of some fool like himself, or on the sudden and sanguine thought of the moment—it strikes him, it takes his fancy, and it is done:—or he deliberately enters into speculations that are at best doubtful, problematical and perilous, depending on many chances, and ruinous if unsuccessful:—he goes perhaps still further aside by the adoption and prosecution of measures that are in their nature unprincipled and wrong; or by following out projects, in themselves sufficiently clear of objection, by *means* that cannot be justified. In these, and other descriptions of conduct, “*the foolishness of a man perverteth his way.*” His schemes and pursuits fail; and disappointments and losses, difficulties, privations, and distresses, necessarily follow.

In these circumstances, the man’s heart too often “*fret-teth against the Lord.*” His lips may or may not give utterance to his fretfulness:—no matter, the *sin* is the same. The evil lies *in the heart*; and there the “Searcher of hearts” sees it. But the fretfulness is sadly misplaced. The blame lies with himself; and to “*fret against the Lord*” is at once unreasonable and impious.

I believe that both *Satan* on the one hand, and *Providence* on the other, get a great deal of blame that does not belong to them: *Satan*, in regard to men’s *conduct*, and *Providence* in regard to their *circumstances*. We are fond of shifting the blame off ourselves. “The serpent beguiled me,

and I did eat," was the first apology for sin. And with far less reason has the apology been often made since. Satan, even with all his hosts, cannot be the author of *all* the evil men do;—and I fear he gets the blame many a time that should lie with men's own corrupt hearts. They "pervert their way," and they accuse Satan:—they fail and suffer, and they accuse God. The depravity of our nature renders us much more prone to impute the *evil* that befalls us to Providence than to trace to the same source the *good* which we acquire. With regard to the *latter*, we are ever disposed, in the pride of our self-sufficiency, to say—"By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent."—But the very same principle makes us very averse to ascribe the *former* to ourselves. We fondly look for causes that will save our own credit, and throw the reflection upon anything rather than upon our own folly or our own sin. As Providence does superintend and control everything, nothing can be more convenient, as an off-set from any imputation against ourselves. The foolish heart of the unsuccessful man finds it so: he "freteth against the Lord." *All* fretting is fretting against the Lord,—for the reason just assigned, that the providence of the Lord *does* exercise an universal control over events. Men may not in so many words direct their complaint against the Lord. They may foolishly talk of their *bad fortune*; they may curse their *ill luck*. But these are only other modes of "fretting against" HIM. They are only the more foolish, that terms are used expressive of what has no existence. They are, *in expression*, atheism; but, *in spirit*, they are fretful murmurings against what is actually the ordering of God.

This "fretting against the Lord" is often exemplified, when a man sees others succeed in schemes which he looked upon, and perhaps with justice, as foolish and most unpromising. In such case, the *unsuccessful* man frets the more. He has "perverted his way," and brought his troubles on himself; but another, whose way was in his estimation still more perverse, has succeeded; and why should not he succeed too?—But success to folly and perverseness is *the*

exception; and nothing can be more unreasonable, surely, than for a man to “fret against the Lord,” because He has not, in *his* case, reversed the natural tendencies of things!

There is one case in which the tendency to “fret against the Lord,” rather than to acknowledge His kindness, is strikingly apparent. It is every man’s duty to “acknowledge God in all his ways.” He who neglects or despises this, “perverteth his way and sinneth.” He violates every dictate of gratitude, of sound reason, and of Scripture. This “perversion of his way” may be the very cause why he has not obtained the object of his desire; and yet his heart “frets against the Lord,” as the author of the evil that comes upon him, although he would not at all own Him in the pursuit of the good on which he had set his heart! There is something very shocking in this:—when a man never thinks of God, as it were, but with a curse; never thinks of Him but as bringing evil! When in the full pursuit of wealth and pleasure, “God is not in all his thoughts,” to own his dependence upon Him. When he succeeds and prospers, “God is not in all his thoughts” to bless Him for his kindness. But whenever he fails; whenever misfortune crosses his path; whenever evil comes upon him—then he thinks of God; but only to “fret against” Him and accuse Him of partiality. How unjust and ungenerous this spirit!

Another of the ways in which the principle of the text is exemplified is *in the pursuit of happiness*. A man seeks it in various ways, but he does not find it. Still there is remaining vexation of spirit; still an aching void; still some Mordecai, on whose account all else avails him nothing; still some “dead fly” that spoils the odour of the precious ointment; still something “crooked which cannot be made straight, something wanting which cannot be numbered.” He acquires *wealth*; but wealth does not bring him the satisfaction he anticipated from it. There is still some annoyance; something that does not go to his mind; something that galls his spirit; something which he finds riches cannot do for him. He gets *learning*; he gets *honour*; he gets *fame*; but it will not do. There is a want. He cannot, per-

haps, tell how; but, somehow or other, he is not happy. "His heart frets" to find it so. But the truth is,—he is foolishly "perverting his way." He is taking all ways to find happiness but the *right* way. He is seeking it, and expecting to find it, without making God himself his CHIEF good. If, instead of vainly "fretting," he would only be persuaded to come to HIM, he would then find what would effectually fill the void; what would settle the disquietude; what would put a perpetual end to the discontent and the felt but unknown want. He has been "hewing out to himself broken cisterns that can hold no water," and "fretting" that he cannot get his thirst quenched. Would he but cease thus to "pervert his way," and come to "the Fountain of living water," to which he is graciously invited, he should drink and thirst no more. To everything here below which yields at the best but a temporary gratification, and leaves behind a feeling of its insufficiency, it may be said, in the language of the Saviour respecting the water of the well of Sychar—"Whoso drinketh of *this* water must *thirst again*:"—but when a man once drinks of the "fountain of living water," he shall "*never thirst*:" *that* water becomes in him "a well of water springing up into everlasting life!"

There is *another* way in which this principle operates—another department in which it displays itself—I mean in regard to the *prohibitory laws of God*, and the *dictates of conscience when they are violated*. "The foolishness of a man perverteth his way." He follows the world. He chooses evil rather than good. He is quite sensible he is doing wrong. Conscience remonstrates, and reproaches, and sharply stings him. He is uneasy, and sometimes when alone, very unhappy. Solitude is irksome to him; for it is then, when other voices are still, that she most effectually makes herself heard. He is disquieted and restless. He frets,—but alas! it is often "against the Lord." He is displeased with the law. Why should it be so *very* strict? Why not allow a little more indulgence? He is sullenly displeased, at the stinging reproofs of the inward monitor. Why cannot he do as he will, but conscience

must be pricking and tormenting him? Can't it let him alone?—He frets too at the penalty annexed to sin. Why so heavy a punishment? Why such fearful threatenings—of the “undying worm” and the “unquenchable fire?” Why cannot he take his indulgence, but hell with its fiery gulfs must yawn before him? Why, in a word, are there so many things that keep him from having peace in sin?—Or, still further—Why is his nature what it is? He throws the blame on his Maker for giving him, as he alleges in the bitterness of a fretful spirit, such passions, and then damning him for the indulgence of them. He cannot believe He will. If He does, He must be a tyrant!

Vain and fool-hardy sinner!—how reckless the presumption that would throw the charge of thy sins on that “God who is light, and in whom is no darkness at all!” Be considerate and humble. Think, ere you venture to speak, on what regards *existing and incontrovertible facts* in the administration of the infinite God! Presume not to imagine you can sound the depths of His counsels.—If you *will* go on in sin, and make your fallen nature your excuse, and expose your immortal soul to the jeopardy of damnation because you cannot solve all the difficulties, and unravel all the mysteries, connected with the origin of evil and the mode of the transmission of a sinful and tainted nature, and the grounds of a fallen creature's responsibility:—there is no help for you. “Your hearts may fret against the Lord,” for not having prevented the entrance of sin, and kept man in his first estate. But this *is not wise*. You are in “foolishness perverting your way.” Your wisdom is, instead of puzzling yourselves with fruitless metaphysical perplexities about *how* the disease originated, and *why* it was permitted, humbly and thankfully to embrace the remedy which God, in love, has provided:—instead of “fretting against Him,” to “come to Him that you may have life.” You are acting an ungrateful, an unworthy, an infatuated part, in “fretting” at your fallen state, and refusing the means of recovery. But the plain truth is, there is *guile* in your very fretfulness: it is not with your fallen nature that you are dissatisfied. You

are *in love* with it:—you have no desire to part with it; no desire to be freed from its existing propensities:—your “fretting” is, not that you are possessors of such a nature, but that you cannot get it indulged with impunity.

Again:—men *seek peace to their consciences* by various means; and in *this* respect too “the foolishness of a man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the Lord.” He tries to find it in ways of his own devising:—he thinks he may make a compromise for the indulgence of some sins by abstinence from others:—he thinks he may do with a partial, if it be, as he fancies, a *sincere* obedience:—he imagines he may atone for his sins by penances, and pilgrimages, and charities:—by these and other means he tries it; but still he fails. —When he thinks of God and of God’s law, the peace which at times he fancies he has found will not abide the test. The foundation on which it rests will not stand scrutiny in the light of Heaven. He is still subject to misgivings and fears, and distracting forebodings, and questions that cannot be answered to the mind’s satisfaction. Peace still flees from him: the worm still gnaws—conscience still brings its charges; and there is a distressing feeling that they cannot be satisfactorily met, nor its remonstrances duly pacified. He wonders why he should not have peace. He “frets” because he cannot find it. But why should he fret? and above all why should he “fret *against the Lord?*” He is “perverting his way.” He is not seeking peace in God’s way. There is peace for every sinner through the blood of the cross. This is the only way in which the peace can be enjoyed consistently with the mutual relations between the sinner and God;—the only way in which the sinner is duly humbled and God duly glorified. If any poor presumptuous creature’s spirit shall “fret against the Lord,” because he cannot have peace and salvation in a way more flattering to human nature,—more palatable and gratifying to his pride of heart,—let him remember, that, as a sinner, his pride is unseemly and impious; that his “fretting” on such a ground is infatuation and presumption alike without a name. The pride of the sin-

ner, who thus frets against sovereign mercy, must be his ruin; and he will have brought it upon himself. His heart must be broken down to the acceptance of a gratuitous salvation, through the blood of the cross. If he cannot bring himself to this; if he persists in spurning it—in “fretting” against it,—he must continue to try for himself, and to “fret” at the felt failure of every successive trial. The God with whom he has to do cannot alter His measures, infinitely wise and honourable to Himself, as well as kind and merciful to His creatures, to suit and to please the proud spirit of unsubdued rebellion? If you will not have life on His terms, is the infinite God to surrender the glory of his name and government, to gratify the humour of an ungrateful and haughty despiser of it?—of a perverse spirit that frets in discontent at what ought to fill it with “joy unspeakable” and gratitude such as his heart cannot contain?—O the folly of a poor sinner, “fretting against the Lord,” when He offers him—just what he needs—*mercy*! “Refuse it!” He might well say, “fret against it!—is such a thing possible?” Alas! it is more than possible. Many, in pride of spirit, refuse to bow to mercy, and, by thus “perverting their way,” sink into perdition: and *thus* perishing, they will through eternity have cause to “fret,” not against God but against themselves!

Once more: let no sinner “fret against the Lord,” because the grace that pardons sin associates inseparably with pardon, holiness of heart, and life. The scheme of mercy could not be from God, were it otherwise. There can be no “perverting of our way” more strange and fearful than that which “turns the grace of God into licentiousness,” and “frets against the Lord” because, instead of saving us *from* our sins, He does not save us *in* our sins! The scheme of God is a scheme of salvation: and a salvation that comes from God *must* be a salvation from what exposes to hell as well as from hell itself—a salvation from SIN. No other would be His. It is perfect. It cannot be broken into parts. It must be accepted as a whole, and its blessings enjoyed in their inseparable union.

LECTURE LIV.

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PROV. XIX. 4—15.

“Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour. A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape. Many will entreat the favour of the prince: and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts. All the brethren of the poor do hate him: how much more do his friends go far from him? he pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him. He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul: he that keepeth understanding shall find good. A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish. Delight is not seemly for a fool; much less for a servant to have rule over princes. The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression. The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion: but his favour is as dew upon the grass. A foolish son is the calamity of his father; and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping. House and riches are the inheritance of fathers; and a prudent wife is from the Lord. Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger.”

THERE is a sense, and an important one, in which “wealth” not only may, but ought to “*make friends*,” in which, to the extent of its possession, it is the Saviour's injunction to his disciples so to use it:—“Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations.”* “The mammon of unrighteousness,” is a designation given by our Lord to the riches of this world, because among the men of the world it is so very frequently the *occasion* of unrighteousness—*gotten* by unrighteous means, and used for unrighteous ends.

* Luke xvi, 9.

He inculcates on his disciples its legitimate use; it being, of course, implied, that they who *use* it according to his will, have also so *acquired* it. The employment of it in the benefactions of kindness, is evidently what is commanded; by which the grateful affections of others, the objects of that kindness, may be secured; and, having become the source of satisfaction, and, it may be, of benefit, in the present world, may meet us even in the world to come, giving us a cordial welcome to the “everlasting habitations” prepared by our heavenly Father for his redeemed family, whom his mercy has pardoned, and his Spirit has renewed and made like himself.

But *this* way of “making friends” is evidently not what is meant by Solomon here; as the antithesis sufficiently indicates:—“Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour.” “Wealth” has many means of “making friends,” of which poverty is destitute. It can operate, for its own selfish ends, on the selfish principles of others. These principles lead those under their influence to court the favour of the rich, and to catch with eagerness at every symptom of it, while, in many instances, it is only selfishness *versus* selfishness;—the showing of the favour, and the catching at the favour, being prompted alike by the same motive. “Wealth” can “make friends,” by gifts, entertainments, and various modes of aid to others, which the poor cannot command; and even by exciting and maintaining expectations, which are as foolishly formed and cherished, as they are selfishly encouraged. Let wealth become poverty; then comes the test of the friendship. Let “riches make themselves wings and fly away;” and the selfish friends find wings immediately too. The attraction is gone. The magnet has lost its virtue; or rather its poles are reversed, and it has become repulsive, driving away what before it held in close cohesion. He who, when rich, was surrounded by flattering friends, is now, when poor, found troublesome. Excuses are devised for keeping him at a distance; he is “*separated from his neighbour.*” The reason is, that formerly he could *give*, but now he *needs*; and the selfishness of human nature likes better to *get* than to *give*. O

how different from the tendencies of that corrupt nature is the divine maxim of Jesus—"It is more blessed to give than to receive!" What a world would this be, were this maxim universally adopted, and consistently acted upon! The former part of this verse would continue true:—wealth would still "have many friends;" but they would be all of the description of *grateful* friends, made and held by its benevolent use. But the latter part of the verse would be true no longer; the poor being courted as the object of kindness, for the sake of the blessedness of giving—the luxury of doing him good—would no longer be "separated" and shunned.

It is a comfort to the poor who fear God, that there is One from whom their poverty never "separates" them. "God hath chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him;"—and of Him who, when on earth, "had not where to lay his head," it is said—"He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper." In Him let "the needy" put their trust.

Verse 5. "A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape."*—*Truth* is a part of the conventional morality of the world. Society could not subsist without it. There is a constant tendency in our corrupt nature—I will not say to prefer falsehood to truth when there is no temptation to the former,—no end to be gained by it; but to set truth aside when there *is* a temptation,—any object of self-interest to be attained by its opposite. And falsehood is too frequently practised, to defeat the ends of justice. Were it not for the corruption of our nature, there would be no use for *oaths*. When an oath is administered in any case, falsehood becomes perjury; against which the laws of every well-regulated community direct severe punitive visitation. And even, should the "liar" and the "false witness" escape discovery and punishment among men—"he shall *not* escape" when "God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing." "*All liars*"

* See chaps. vi. 19; xiv. 5, 25.

—and not less *false swearers*—“shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone.”

Verses 6, 7. “Many will entreat the favour of the prince; and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts. All the brethren of the poor do hate him; how much more do his friends go far from him? he pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him.” The contents of these verses are, in their spirit, very similar to those of verse fourth. The truth of them arises out of the same principle—the *selfishness* of our fallen nature; and it was practically evinced *then*, as it is still. Wherever the gratification of its wishes is to be got, selfishness will be found,—plying all its arts. The *throne*, as might, from the power of this principle, be anticipated, has many parasitical and self-interested attendants; hangers on for places, and pensions, and gifts. The gates, and halls, and antechambers of royalty,—or of the representatives and almoners of royalty, will ever be found crowded with applicants. This is one, it may be, of the gratifications and honours, but surely also of the annoyances and mortifications of power and station. It is an annoyance, from the frequent troublesomeness and importunity of the applicants; and it is a mortification,—the prince being well aware that it is not *for his own sake* that the court is paid,—not from any attachment to his person and character,—but solely to his princely power. If he sinks, and another is about to succeed him, he will be forsaken for the successor,—for him who is about to have the gifts and the berths at his disposal. The worship will be withdrawn from the *setting*, and devoutly paid to the *rising* sun.

In the latter of the two verses, “*brethren*” means, as in many other places, *near relations*; while “*friends*” signifies simply *companions*, or persons who have become intimate, but have no consanguinity.—We must not suppose “*the poor*,” to have *merited* dislike by their own conduct. Then, indeed, they would not be entitled to love. The dislike and distance would be only their due. Idleness or profligacy would disfranchise them, in regard to the obligations of their friends to help them. The general sense of the words re-

lates to the tendency of poverty itself to cool affection and to alienate friendship. This may arise from two causes—both alike selfish and unworthy. *First*, “the brethren of the poor” are not fond of owning him as one of their circle. They court alliance with the rich, the honourable, the great,—those who have their place in what the world call *good society*. They take every way of making their connexion with *such* persons known. They speak of it themselves, and are delighted when it is spoken of by others:—but their poorer relatives they rather keep out of sight. They make no mention of them themselves; and when others stumble upon the mention of them, they try to make the connexion as distant as possible, and to put the best face on what they feel to be disreputable, and do not like to hear of. And this, alas! is too frequently the case, even when, in regard to *character*, and the qualities which should render men estimable, the advantage is all on the side of the poverty. If any *kin* can be claimed with the great, it is eagerly done, even let their characters be ever so profligate; while connexion with the poor is concealed and all allusion to it avoided, although they are of the “excellent of the earth” in whom God himself has complacency. Even God’s people are too much in danger of being tempted, by a false and unworthy shame, to feel and act thus,—and to let their countenance sink when a *poor* relation is mentioned, and brighten at the notice of the rich connexions of the family;—although they know how different is the estimate of Him whose followers they profess to be.—O let Christians be on their guard against such conformity to the world! What are children to think, when they see it in their parents;—and when they are thus taught, by example, to value men, and to value relations, not according to character but to mere wealth and station! But there is another reason for the dislike and the distance. *Poor* relations are *burdensome* relations. They stand in need. They present demands, directly or indirectly, upon the purse; and this touches selfishness in another point. They are apt to be thought intrusive and troublesome. They are looked upon with jealousy. Their visits are discouraged.

They are received with coldness; and are given to understand that the longer they are of coming back, so much the better. If they do venture sooner, their repulse becomes sterner. They find a deaf ear, or are put off with fair but indefinite and distant promises; and when by such means they are got rid of for the time, they are followed with a fretful wish that it may be many a day ere their face is seen again.

If such the treatment by *relatives*, what is to be expected of mere friends and acquaintances?—The latter part of the verse is very touching:—“*he pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him.*” Exigency produces importunity. The poor reduced relation or companion urges his suit; reminds of former days of intimacy, and of past professions of friendship—of the claims of kindred—of the urgency of want. But this becomes irksome. It frets the temper; and sometimes frets it the more, in proportion as the justice and truth of the appeal are felt, because then *conscience* secretly puts in its sting; and they are sent away with an imperious and angry scowl.—O! that we would but accustom ourselves, in the true spirit of the “royal law,” to exchange conditions, and to consider how, in such an exchange, *we* should ourselves like to be so treated!—And if Christians would but bethink themselves what would become of them, if God were to deal with them, in their time of need and of application to Him, as they are thus tempted to deal with needy, dependent, and importunate relatives and friends!

We have had the lesson of the next verse, in its spirit and substance, and almost in the very terms, repeatedly before us. It is a lesson of which the importance is so fundamental,—lying as it does at the root of all happiness for time and eternity, that it cannot be too often or too urgently pressed on practical attention, and immediate and hearty compliance:—“He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul: he that keepeth understanding shall find good.” Let a man’s intellect be ever so clear and sound on other matters, he is *insane* if he forgets God, and neglects his

“SOUL.” This is the prevailing insanity of the world,—the *monomania* of the entire race.

Verse 10. “Delight is not seemly for a fool; much less for a servant to have rule over princes.”—The word rendered “*delight*” is here to be understood as meaning prosperity, and abundance of life’s desired enjoyments, from which the delight of men arises:—and a “*fool*” means a man who is little in mind, destitute of knowledge and discretion, or base in character; or all the three. There is an incongruity between the man and his situation. His prosperity and condition attract notice and attention. There is a certain admiration and influence connected with them; but these are ill supported by his mental and moral qualities. What he *has* is out of keeping with what he *is*. You would smile, if you saw a poor man’s ass decked out in trappings of embroidery and gold. Not less incongruous is the union of prosperity and folly. The man occupies a conspicuous position; but there is no corresponding dignity or elevation of mind and character. Besides, in most cases, the “fool” cannot *bear* his good fortune, it renders him vain, insolent, self-sufficient, consequential, and overbearing. He assumes airs, such as only make his imbecility and folly the more apparent, and the unseemliness the greater and the more offensive. And still further—he has not wit enough to *use* his prosperity rightly. He perverts it to foolish, improper, unbecoming purposes; not only failing to apply it for the glory of God and the true benefit of men, but actually applying it to useless, silly, frivolous, fantastic ends, which expose him to universal ridicule.

“*Much less,*” adds Solomon, “*for a servant to have rule over princes.*”—The case is one which has not unfrequently been realized in history. Even when the servant, as sometimes happens, is superior in mental talent and vigour of intellect, and discretion of management, to the prince,—yet still there is unseemliness,—an inversion of established and necessary order. He ought not to be a prince, whose imbecility subjects him to a servant’s rule. It seems evident, however, that by a servant, or slave, is meant a person who,

while he is of low extraction, has mind, and education, and habits correspondingly low; a base-born, grovelling, ignoble spirit. The influence and authority of such a one is of all things the *most* unseemly and disgusting. In whichever sense the words are taken, the unseemliness is equally great. The sense has been given by one interpreter very briefly thus:—A fool knows not how to use abundance, nor a slave authority. The slave may not be naturally inferior; yet his education and habits of life render him altogether unfit for the acts of government. There have been exceptions. Among such, however, it is quite improper to place the case of Joseph; inasmuch as Joseph, though, in the mysterious providence of God, a slave in Egypt, was *not* such by birth or education; but by both, as well as by the grace of God, fitted for rule.

Verse 11. "The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression."*

A man of true "discretion" and sound understanding will not be "easily provoked." This is one of the attributes of genuine *prudence*, as really as of genuine *charity*. A quick and touchy irritability is the mark of a weak and foolish, rather than of a vigorous and sensible mind. Wood that is light and porous,—in which the sap, which is its life and strength, has ceased to circulate,—is proverbially the most easily *fired*.

When provoked, the man of discretion exerts his self-control; restrains resentment; checks and curbs it; knowing well that the instant indulgence of anger,—giving loose to its first emotions, so that they burst forth in ebullitions of violence,—is sure to carry the subject of it *to extremes*; and that when this is the case in the administration of reproof or reprehension, it at once exposes the man himself, and wrongs his neighbour. "It is his glory to pass over a transgression." It is so because it is much more *difficult*—self-control requiring far greater effort than self-indulgence; because it shows the operation of high *moral and spiritual principle*,—a regard to God's authority, such as overcomes the

* Comp. chap. xii. 16; xiv. 29; xv. 18.

fear of man, especially of his contempt and ridicule, the worst of all to bear; and because it is the greatest glory of man, or of any creature, to be *like God*, whose Name is still, as it was of old—"The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin," Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

Verse 12. "The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion: but his favour is as dew upon the grass."—The "*wrath of the king*" affords indication of the danger arising from it in the effects which may follow:—just as the "roaring of the lion" does. The *power* of offended Majesty is thus intimated, and warning given for timely escape from its punitive inflictions. On the other hand, "his favour is *like dew upon the grass*." The image presents the natural association of freshness, beauty, glory, growth, fruitfulness. The dew falls softly on the face of nature—refreshing, beautifying, adorning, enlivening, fructifying. Thus comes upon its fortunate object, as the world esteems him, the favour of the prince. O! if *he* is regarded as fortunate who escapes the one, and enjoys the other; what shall we say of the "wrath" and "the favour" of the King of kings!* Above all things to be shunned, O shun His wrath; above all things to be desired and sought, seek and desire His favour. There is no misery like the endurance of the one; there is no blessedness like the enjoyment of the other. The one will sink you to hell; the other will raise you to heaven. Nay, the one *is* hell; the other *is* heaven.

Verse 13. "A foolish son is the calamity of his father; and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping."—In this verse there are brought before us *two* sources of great unhappiness in domestic life. The *first* of the two is the subject of frequent reference.† Let not the words be understood as if this source of unhappiness were always to be regarded simply as a *calamity in providence*. Let not parents too readily so regard it, and thus "lay a too flatter-

* Comp. 2 Sam. xxiii. 4; Psal. lxxii. 6; Amos iii. 6—8.

† See chap. x. 1; xv. 20; xvii. 21, 25.

ing unction to their souls." The blame may lie, and in most instances, if not in all, *does* lie, and *must* lie, *with themselves*. Have their instructions been sufficiently scriptural? their admonitions sufficiently faithful? their example sufficiently consistent? their guardianship sufficiently vigilant? their entreaties and persuasions sufficiently affectionate? their efforts sufficiently united? their prayers sufficiently fervent and importunate? their faith in the promises of the covenant sufficiently firm and influential? O ponder, ye parents, such questions as these, and lay them deeply and solemnly to heart.

Then we have—"the contentions of a wife"—presented under the figure of "*a continual dropping*." The idea is not simply that of *uninterrupted constancy*, although that is what is directly expressed;—it is in the *effects* of that constancy that the spirit of the comparison lies: As, first,—the most vexatious *discomfort*. The image is not that of mere falling rain, but of rain finding its way through the roof, and everywhere "dropping;" so that there is no escaping it:—it comes upon you in every corner:—you cannot abide in the house; or, if you do, it is amidst unceasing annoyance. Thus is it where dwells an angry, contentious, brawling woman. She banishes husband and children from the house. There is no living under the same roof with her. Or if a sense of duty, or a feeling of necessity obliges them to remain, it is in the midst of incessant irritation, and vexation of spirit. It is not easy, I should think, to determine, whether the clamour of the scolding termagant or the ill-natured discontented peevishness of the shrew, be the worse to bear. The man is to be pitied who happens upon either; the one ever passionate, the other ever complaining; the one angry at everything, the other pleased with nothing; the one ever furious, the other ever fretful. But further, their vexation and annoyance is not all:—the "*continual dropping*" is very injurious and destructive to the house,—rotting its timbers, loosening and disengaging its cement, and endangering its stability. So are "the contentions of a wife" ruinous to the family *interests*, as well as to its comfort and

peace. They dishearten, dispirit, and paralyse exertion; they fret and sour the temper abroad as well as at home. When a man has cheerful domestic enjoyment at his own fireside,—unbending there after the toils of the day,—tasting with a happy husband's and father's relish the sweetest of earthly sweets, the sweets embosomed in the one word HOME,—O with what cheerful alacrity does he set about and pursue his labour through the day, and, at its close, bring his earnings to the kind, smiling, industrious, frugal, managing, partner of his life! But when it is otherwise, his “hands hang down and his knees are feeble.” He goes out to his daily labour with a heavy heart—and, instead of anticipating the evening as a time of relief and ease, and compensation for his day's fatigue, he sees the hour of his return home coming on with a sigh,—and lifts the latch of his door to enter his abode, with a heart still heavier than when he left it. Ah! this is a sad case.—But still further:—the *respectability* of the family is affected. Friends and neighbours keep aloof; and while the wife is blamed, and the husband is pitied, the blame and the pity are blended generally with feelings, and accompanied with expressions, that are more akin to scorn and ridicule than to respect. And what, in many cases, is the sad result? The poor man, finding no attraction at his own fireside has recourse to the club and the alehouse; and the history of a family, which might have been decent, well-provided, respected, and happy, ends in destitution, wretchedness, and dependence:—like a tenement, which by a “continual dropping” has mouldered and decayed, and comes to ruin ere it has stood half its time.

And O! what shall be said, when the two evils in this verse *unite*! There cannot be a case more pitiable. Under the former *alone*, a man may be sustained and comforted by the cheering society and converse of a fond wife, the sharer and the soother of *his* sorrows, as he is of *hers*:—and under the latter alone, his misery may be not a little mitigated by the prudence, the sympathy, and the aid of a pious and affectionate son. But when the two come together—how deplorable!—the husband and the father alike wretched,—

neither relation alleviating, but each aggravating, the affliction of the other!

Though my illustration, as you perceive, has been taken from inferior life,—from the dwellings of the labouring poor; yet be it remembered, the misery of such paternal and conjugal disappointments is very far from being confined to that class of the community. It is to be found in the highest circles of society, as well as in the lowest.—Nor let it be forgotten that the case might be *reversed*. It is not husbands alone that are made unhappy by peevish or passionate wives: many a wife leads a life of daily irksomeness and grief from the behaviour of a hasty and furious, or a selfish and sullen, and unreasonable husband. Let husbands then look well to themselves, how far they may be accountable for the tempers of their wives. “Few women have so little of the heart of a woman, or a human creature, as to make those men unhappy that treat them with discretion and tenderness; or, if women really deserve this character, gentle admonition and kind usage are the best means of reclaiming them.”

The next verse is a following out of the same subject.—“House and riches are the inheritance of fathers”—the paternal inheritance; that is—not what fathers inherit, but what fathers transmit as an inheritance to their sons. They are things which a man may receive by inheritance from his father, without any labour for them of his own:—“But a prudent wife is from the Lord.”—Not that “house and riches” are *not* from the Lord too. But the meaning seems to be, that when a young man has succeeded to his father’s “house and riches,” there is something yet before him incomparably more important and more closely connected with the happiness of his future life; namely, his obtaining a suitable companion to share that house and those riches with him—“*a prudent wife*.” If he errs here—his inheritance will be of little avail to his happiness. The antithesis in the verse seems evidently to convey the idea that the *latter* of the two blessings is unspeakably the more precious of the two. The former—let the house be a palace for splendour, and the

riches the most abundant that ever were accumulated,—could not confer happiness, were there strife and brawling, alienation and coldness, in the family. The poor peasant, to whom neither “house nor riches” have descended, but who labours with manly industry—

“From morn to noon, from noon to dewy eve,”

to share his little all with the active, economical, affectionate partner of his life,—for whom, on his return home—

“The busy housewife plies her evening care;—
Whose children run, to lisp their sire’s return.
And climb his knees the envied kiss to share,”

has an infinitely happier lot than the wealthiest Nabob of the East, without that *love-feast* of connubial and domestic peace, contentment, and cordial harmony.

“*A prudent wife*”—called elsewhere “a virtuous woman,” is one in whom “the heart of her husband can safely trust,” in regard to rectitude of principle, and propriety of conduct; whose dealings he does not require to be for ever watching; who, from his full reliance on her judgment and integrity, keeps him “without carefulness;” who, in the language of the Apostle, “loves her husband, loves her children, is discreet, chaste, a keeper at home, good, obedient to her own husband:”—one who counsels him in difficulty, cheers him in depression, and, by joint participation, doubles to him every joy and divides every care and sorrow. Certainly, among temporal blessings there is not a more precious gift of heaven to man below. It is “*from the Lord*.”—The meaning is, not, as some have, most falsely, and calumniously to the female character, alleged, that there is no possibility, from the artfulness of woman, of forming any right estimate of what any one of the whole sex is to be after she has become a wife,—that it is all a lottery. This, I repeat, is a false and calumnious representation. It is not that we must look to providence, as in a matter where any consideration and care of our own are of no avail. It is true, there *are* cases of artful concealment and simulation, in

which, subsequently to union, tempers discover themselves, of which the existence was never previously suspected. But, generally speaking, the fault lies on the side of the choosing party. "A prudent wife" is not to be got by an imprudent mode of choice. The gift must be sought "from the Lord." But this does not mean that the Lord is supernaturally to point out the individual. Our own discretion must be put in exercise, along with prayer for the divine superintendence and direction, so as to bring about a happy result. And then the precious gift should be owned, and the all-bountiful Giver praised for his goodness in bestowing it.

Verse 15. "Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger."* The tendency of a slothful spirit is, to grow by indulgence; yawning indolence ending in a "*deep sleep*." And this is a time of defenceless exposure, both of person and property, as well as of entire unproductiveness. "He awaketh, and his soul is empty." But he must "*suffer hunger*;" and, as being the effect solely of his own folly, it is right that he should be left to feel it.

The sentiment holds as to *spiritual* concerns. Spiritual lassitude and sloth grows on the professor who indulges it. It becomes lethargy. It puts the soul in danger of falling into "a deep sleep." A torpor comes over all its living energies; and then, incapacity for any active exertion increases. This is a period of special peril to the divine life in the soul. Its last spark is in danger of becoming extinct, and spiritual death of ensuing. Satan takes the advantage; plies his temptations; drives the listless and indolent into the grossest and vilest sins, and fills the conscience with a despair, that rivets the bonds of iniquity.

The second part of the verse applies equally to what is spiritual. There is "*hunger*" in the spiritual, as well as in the natural or animal life. When the soul is in sound health, it "*hungers after*" the word and ordinances of God, and finds constant gratification and relief from the enjoyment of them. But the "*hunger*" which the soul is here

* Comp. chap. vi. 6—11; x. 4; xv. 19.

spoken of as *suffering*, is a *painful feeling of want*;—the result of indolence and inactivity, and that cannot be immediately relieved; an unsatisfied longing, a gnawing emptiness. When the divine word is neglected, or not studied with attention and care; when no new knowledge is acquired, and there is no enlargement of the old, there is a vacancy in the mind,—a painful craving,—an appetite that is in need of supply, and ill at ease without it. When the stomach, the principal organ of digestion in the bodily frame, has not a sufficiency of aliment to keep its chemical powers in action,—its digestive juices give pain—sometimes most severe—by acting gnawingly upon itself. Now the renewed soul *lives on divine knowledge*. This is its food. It must have something to keep its powers in action; new supplies of its appropriate and necessary nourishment. There is a peculiar satisfaction to the soul, in the acquisition of fresh knowledge; like the satisfaction experienced by the corporeal appetite from the introduction of food to relieve and satisfy the appetite of hunger. The pain produced by felt ignorance, arises from the unnatural state in which the soul is placed by the want of that on which its powers can operate, and from which their operation may extract enjoyment. This pain in reality springs from *conscience*. It is right it should be felt. When felt, it will prove a stimulus to seek the nutriment by which alone it can be removed, and which alone can restore the healthful activity of the vital principles of the divine life, and renewed and corresponding growth. If our souls “suffer hunger;” if they pine and starve—the fault is our own. In the divine stores there is no lack of suitable provision. Every kind of supply is to be found in abundance, laid up for us in God’s word and ordinances. But there must be diligence to obtain it. As corn in the granary will not nourish the body; so knowledge in the book will not nourish the soul. If you would not suffer from the gnawing “hunger” of ignorance, but would have the satisfaction and growth produced by knowledge, you must work for it; you must put forth effort to obtain it; you must find it, by such effort, in its native

variety, and, by the process of “comparing spiritual things with spiritual,” you must appropriate it to the varied wants of your higher nature. Attend, then, to the duty enjoined upon you, to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour;”—to “add to your faith, knowledge;” to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom;” to “work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling, that God may work in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” “Give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things ye shall never fall, but have an entrance ministered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

And let all remember,—that, although they may have no relish for the provision of God’s word, as the nourishment of the soul,—this absence of spiritual relish is their *sin*; and that their souls, thus famished, shall “suffer hunger” in the world to come, for evermore; endure all the pangs of “the second death,”—all the means of life, which they had here rejected, being eternally withdrawn.

LECTURE LV.

PROV. XIX. 16—20.

“He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul: but he that despiseth his way shall die. He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again. Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying. A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again. Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.”

THE phrase “He that *keepeth the commandment*,” appears to be one which comprehends the giving of an appropriate reception and treatment to every part of the divine word. Every part of that word comes with authority,—has the full force of *law*. It is God’s commandment that we receive His truth, as well as God’s commandment that we do His will. What, in Scripture, is called the *obedience of faith*, includes both;—the believing reception of truth, and the surrender of the heart and life to its holy practical influence,—which, in consequence of the perfect harmony between God’s *mind* and God’s *will*, is the same thing with conformity to the precepts of the divine law. We are equally bound by “the law of faith” as by the “law of works.” The *first* of God’s commandments to men, as sinners, is that they accept His salvation,—that they acquiesce in the terms of His offer of mercy. The rebel mind has not resumed its subjection to God till that is done. It remains in the spirit of rebellion; and in that spirit, obedience to no precept can be acceptably rendered. We must first give “the obedience of faith” to God’s testimony; and then the obedience of practice to God’s pre-

cepts. The latter is the result and evidence of the former:—and it is by *both* that we “keep the commandment.”

And this, as we have frequently had occasion to urge, is connected with the life and well-being of the soul. It is by the faith of God’s truth that the soul first receives life—spiritual life; and it is in “keeping” God’s precepts, under the influence of that faith, that this life of the soul is maintained, enjoyed, and advanced. Everything that is contrary to God’s “commandment,” wars against the life of the soul. Hence it is added—“*But he that despiseth his way shall die.*”—“*His way*” we might naturally suppose to mean *God’s way*. But the name of God not occurring in the previous part of the verse, the phrase seems rather meant to describe the man who scornfully disregards all admonitions, both divine and human, who smiles indifferently at every warning; who follows the “sight of his eyes and the imagination of his heart;” walking at random, instead of carefully and constantly “cleansing his way, by taking heed thereto according to God’s word.” “*He shall die*”—“die the death;”—not merely the death that consigns the body to the grave, but the death that consigns the soul to hell—“the second death.” He shall be lost for ever.

Verse 17. “He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.”—The “*pity*” in the verse before us, is *practical* pity; the pity that gives,—the pity that acts,—the pity that visits, and comforts, and relieves. It is not the whinings of an unprofitable sentimentalism. It is not the pity of words, that says “Depart in peace—be warmed, be filled;”—it is the pity of deeds, that “gives those things which are needful for the body:”—not evaporating in sighs, or drowning itself in tears, but testifying its sympathy by substantial acts of kindness. Its practical character appears in the very words before us. He is supposed, in the exercise of pity, to *give*: “he that hath pity upon the poor *lendeth* unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.”

The words imply, first, the Lord’s own regard for the poor. The intimation of this in the words, is strong. We

can hardly give a more satisfactory assurance of our regard for any one, than when we become responsible for all that is given to him; declaring whatever is done for him a favour to ourselves, and an obligation laid upon us to the doer or the giver. Thus the Lord here tells us, that all *gifts* to the *poor* are *loans* to *Him*.

The mode of expression before us, implies further, a *right principle* on the part of the giver. It is of great moment to mark this. There is much of giving to the poor, that has no *principle* in it, properly so called, at all; and there is not a little that springs from such principles and motives as have anything but the sanction of God's word. A man may give to the poor, from the mere imitation of others; from the mere wish to be rid of them; from the ostentatious love of *eclat*; from the presumption of self-righteousness, and the hope of "covering" by it "the multitude of his sins." Surely the Lord, in such cases, cannot be regarded as approving and accrediting the gift, and placing it in His book of remembrance as a loan to Himself. He looks to the heart. He has respect to motives. The giver must evidently be considered as having, when he gives, a regard to the Lord; as acting in obedience to His will, in imitation of His example, in humble and lively gratitude to Him as the author of all his mercies. He loves and pities the poor, because God loves and pities them, and has made it his duty, and the appropriate manifestation of his gratitude, that he should feel for them, and seek their good. And he does so all the more in the view of the divine example as embodied in the perfect character of the incarnate Redeemer; whose whole life on earth exemplified the fulfilment of the prophecy concerning him,—“He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight,” Psal. lxxii. 12—14.

It is implied also, specially, that the gift is bestowed, *with no expectation of any return from the poor himself*. It is not a loan to *him*, but a gift; and a gift bestowed, not

from any hope of his becoming available for some selfish purpose at a future time; for then it would have in it, whether the receiver knew the purpose or not, the essential spirit of selfish bribery. It is this *disinterested* giving that is enjoined, and that is pleasing in God's sight.* The *loan* is not to the *poor*, but to *the Lord*. Hence the words imply still further, the *certainty* of a *divine* return,—and *confidence in that certainty*:—"and that which he hath given *will He pay him again*." Such is the security. What is given is not lost. It is laid up in the bank of faith,—in the exchequer of heaven. It may be returned in blessing here, in the present world. Thus it was promised of old;† and so stands the promises still.‡ And it shall be returned in future rewards of grace, the recompences of Him who himself "delighteth in mercy."§ What a motive is here to the practice of generous, openhanded charity. When given on right principles, the gift is a "laying up of treasures in heaven!"|| The invisible character of the security, and the distance of the time of the return, are both trials of faith;—and were there more "faith in God," there would be more giving to the poor; were there more "full assurance of hope," there would be more of the lodging in loans to the Lord, of property above.

Verses 18, 19. "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying. A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again."—This too is a subject which has already been considered.¶ The verses before us, however, suggest some additional views of it; and it is a subject on which—as occasions for the use of the rod are occurring every day and every hour, and thus every day and every hour may good be done by the right, and evil by the wrong application of it—parents need to be frequently admonished. Observe, then—1. It is here assumed, that to the parent the infliction of chastisement is *painful*,—that it is a measure adopted

* See Luke vi. 31—36; xiv. 12—14.

† Deut. xv. 7—11.

‡ 2 Cor. ix. 6—8. § Matt. x. 41, 42; 1 Tim. vi. 17—19; Heb. vi. 10.

|| Comp. Luke xii. 33, 34.

¶ Chap. xiii. 24.

with reluctance, involving as it does a strong and distressing conflict between feeling and duty, between the heart and the judgment. All parents who come not under the description—"without natural affection"—are tenderly sensible of this.

—2. Correction with the rod should never be resorted to when the end designed can be effected by *other means*. God himself expostulates before he smites. The parent is not to be charged with "sparing the rod," who can effect the ends of discipline without it;—whether by touching the springs of affection, or, where they are at all understood, appealing to higher principles. The Lord's *look* to Peter had more effect than the severest visitation could have had. And if a parent has the affections of his children in such a degree, as that a look of grave displeasure shall affect their hearts more deeply with a sense of wrong than a hundred stripes,—why should the hundred stripes, or any one of them be inflicted?

—3. When the rod is used—as used it must at times be—the end in view should be, purely and exclusively, the *benefit of the child*, not the gratification of any resentful passion on the part of the parent. Should the latter be apparent to the child, the effect is lost, and worse than lost; for, instead of the sentiment of grief and melting tenderness, there will be engendered a feeling of sullen hostility, a bitterness and alienation of spirit, a secret spurning at the rod, if not even of angry scorn towards him who has manifested selfish passion rather than parental love in the use of it. To avoid so sad a result, I repeat, *no parent should allow himself to correct in a passion*. If the hand that is trembling with rage seizes the rod, there is almost a certainty of harm rather than good being the result.—4. The verses direct, that it should be used *early*, by which, of course, must be understood, as soon as the nature and end of correction can be at all supposed to be apprehended. Not sooner, certainly. It were unnatural and reckless cruelty to "chasten with the rod," before there could be any understanding of its design,—of the connexion between the chastisement and the fault for which it was inflicted. This connexion it is of essential importance, distinctly to point out and impress; and as early as there is

reason to think that the correction can be so understood as to serve the purpose of salutary restraint, it may and ought to be begun. The reason is, that it is so much easier to prevent the formation of the habit of evil, than to overcome it when formed. Nip the first blossoms of sin, as soon as they appear; lest they ripen into "the fruits of Sodom, and the clusters of Gomorrah."—5. You are here taught further, that *firmness* must be in union with affection in applying the rod. The words seem to express a harsh, yet it is an important and most salutary lesson:—"let not thy soul spare for his crying." The words do not mean, that you should not feel, very far from that. It was the knowledge that feeling was unavoidable, and that the strength and tenderness of it were ever apt to tempt parents to relent and desist, and leave their end unaccomplished,—that made it necessary to warn against too ready a yielding to this natural inclination. The child may cry, and cry bitterly, previously to the correction; but, when you have reason to think the crying is for the rod rather than for the fault, and that, but for the threatened chastisement, the heart would probably have been unmoved, and the eyes dry;—then you must not allow yourselves to be so unmanned by his tears, as to suspend your purpose, and decline its infliction. If a child perceives this, (and soon are children sharp enough to find it out) he has discovered the way to move you next time; and will have recourse to it accordingly.—This leads me to remark—6. The rod must be used with *discriminative proportion* according to the magnitude of the fault committed, and according to the variety of tempers with which you have to deal. This variety is very great. A look or a word will go deeper into the heart of one child than the severest punishment will affect another. One child is yielding, another stubborn; one gentle, another fiery. The great principle is, that you must not yield till you have gained your end. Violent, ungovernable tempers must be met with calm but settled and determined firmness; they must be subdued: your point must be steadily and peremptorily maintained; to give way, would only be to increase the evil, and greatly to

augment your own difficulty and suffering on a recurrence of the need for chastisement, and the necessity of giving way again. In this sense, and in this connexion, the nineteenth verse is understood by many, and, at any rate, the *principle* of it bears a clear and forcible application to the case of correction:—"A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again." Just substitute *child* for *man*; and mark how true the statement is. If the child is "once delivered" from chastisement,—if "his crying," which in this case is the crying of tumultuous and bitter passion, once prevail to induce the giving up of the point, and of the attempt to inflict "the rod,"—the presumption grows. Passion, thus accomplishing its end, will rage with the greater fury next time;—will cry, and writhe, and spurn, and kick, with the more determined violence:—and "*thou must do it again.*" The words may be used either of the *deliverance* or of the *correction*. Your delivering him, or allowing him to escape once, will, in the way just mentioned, produce the stronger necessity for your letting him off again:—or (which is better) punish *now*; for if not, it must be done, and done with the greater severity to him, and the greater pain to yourself, in consequence of indulgence having confirmed and accumulated the evil, and rendered it the more hard to subdue.

I have taken the 19th verse in connexion with the 18th as applying remarkably well to the case of high-spirited and passionate children. They need not, however, be thus limited. They are understood by some commentators, as signifying *that violent passions ever inflict their own punishment upon their unhappy subjects*. These men are their own tormentors. They are never at rest. They are ever falling into scrapes and difficulties, and quarrels, and suits. You may "deliver" them—but they are no sooner freed from one, than they run into another,—thus punishing themselves, and keeping their friends in incessant vexation and trouble.

The words may also mean, in regard to wrathful *men*, what we have considered them as signifying in regard to wrathful children;—that they *ought* to be punished,—

punished now—in order to break and subdue their violence. It is better to coerce them firmly at once, as the only likely means of bringing them to their senses, and preventing incessant repetitions of their offensive and violent conduct.

Verse 20. "Hear counsel and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end." This brief counsel is in harmony with the whole of the introductory portion of this book, as well as with others of its proverbial sayings.—"*Thy latter end*," there can be no doubt, refers to *death*; to the time of bidding a final adieu to the world and all its relations and interests. That "latter end," indeed, is not the end of our being. Were it so, the words—"that thou mayest be *wise* in thy latter end" would be bereft of all their meaning. The wisdom, in that case, both for life in its prime, and life in its close, would be, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!"

Wisdom in our "latter end" has reference to our preparation for what is beyond,—for the subsequent eternity of our being:—compared with which the present life is "less than nothing and vanity," and from its relation to which, as its preparatory stage, the present derives all its value. He who, at the end of life, is unprepared for the life to come, will then feel himself to have been a fool all his days. He reaches the verge of a never-ending and never-changing state of existence;—and the time given him to prepare for it has been wasted—all wasted, on its own worthless and passing interests. Even if the man has lived what is called a virtuous life, without any extraordinary out-breakings of the grosser vices—yet, if he has been a man of the world, —without God, and without any such anticipations of eternity as to induce preparation for it in earnest, in the only way in which such preparation can be made by a sinful creature—by an interest in the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, by obtaining through the one the pardon of sin, and through the other a renewed and holy heart;—he will then be found, in regard to all that is before him—all the vast and incalculable interests of the future world, emphatically a *fool*. It is a sad thing to *live* a fool; it is a

much sadder thing to *die* a fool. But the one generally follows the other. The greater proportion of men die as they live. Wouldst thou then be wise in "thy latter end?"—attend *now* to the affectionate admonition:—"HEAR COUNSEL, AND RECEIVE INSTRUCTION."

What can all the science and philosophy of the world do for a man, any more than its wealth, to make him "wise in his latter end?"

"Yon cottager, who weaves at her own door,
Pillow and bobbins all her little store,
Content, though mean, and cheerful if not gay,
Shuffling her threads about the live-long day,
Just earns a scanty pittance, and at night
Lies down secure, her heart and pocket light:—
Just knows, and knows no more, her Bible true,
A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew,
And in that charter reads, with sparkling eyes,
Her title to a treasure in the skies!—
Oh! happy peasant! Oh! unhappy bard!
His the mere tinsel, hers the rich reward:—
He, praised perhaps for ages yet to come,
She, never heard of half a mile from home:
He, lost in errors his vain heart prefers,
She, safe in the simplicity of hers!"

All the wit of Voltaire, and all the fulsome flattery of his friends, could but ill suppress the horrors of his dying hours. He could not bear the very mention of the name of Jesus. Hume died "as a fool dieth." The concealed but, it is believed, authentic accounts of the nurse that waited upon him, attest the secret misgivings, groans and agonies of his dying chamber:—but, even were there no truth in them, his low pitiful jestings were more affecting by far than the direst distress. Even on his own principles,—even on the supposition of death being the final cessation of conscious existence,—was *that* a time for indulging in dull attempts at drollery? Surely, the very idea of the complete and everlasting extinction of all those powers of thought and speculation and inquiry, which had engaged his life, and which were on the stretch for further effort and further acquisition,—the quenching of all this light,—the transition from a living, in-

telligent, active mind, capable of everlasting expansion and corresponding enlargement of knowledge and delight, to a clod of earth, a mere handful of unconscious dust,—was enough to make any man seriously thoughtful, and to render joking, and *such* joking, most unnatural and unreasonable, and to excite more than a suspicion that there was a lurking unbelief of his own philosophy, and an appalling apprehension of a life to come, which this drivelling facetiousness was meant to cover from observation. And what is the wisdom that can only enable a man to say, as Tindal said—“If there be a God, I desire that he may have mercy upon me?” Is it wisdom to leave even a doubt on such subjects to the “latter end?” It is he who “hears counsel and receives instruction,”—the counsel and instruction of God—whose “latter end is peace.” It is he, who, viewing the full harmony of the divine perfections in the salvation of sinners through the mediation of Jesus, can look forward without alarm,—can cast himself on the covenanted mercy of God, and anticipate death as a release from the sorrows and the sins of mortality, and the introduction to perfect purity and “fulness of joy.” It is he who can say, in triumph over the fears of death and the grave, of judgment and of hell—“I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing,” 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

LECTURE LVI.

PROV. XIX. 21—29.

“There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand. The desire of a man is his kindness; and a poor man is better than a liar. The fear of the Lord tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil. A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again. Smite a scorner, and the simple will beware; and reprove one that hath understanding, and he will understand knowledge. He that wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach. Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge. An ungodly witness scorneth judgment: and the mouth of the wicked devoureth iniquity. Judgments are prepared for scorners, and stripes for the back of fools.”

THE first of these verses contains a very important truth;—a truth which may occasion many crosses and pains in the present experience even of the children of God, but which, in the final winding-up of the entire system of His providential administration, will, on the retrospect, fill their minds with admiring satisfaction, their hearts with gratitude, and their lips with praise.

The words are susceptible of a more limited, and of a more enlarged, interpretation. By some they are understood as meaning no more than that human counsels succeed only to the extent to which God purposes they should;—that “all our ways” are entirely under His control; so that in no case can we go one step further than He permits.

This, however, is but a branch of a more general position;—namely, that while in the hearts of men there are “many

devices,"—many desires, intentions, and resolutions,—many objects, with the plans and means of their attainment,—God has counsels of His own,—specific ends to work out;—and that not only shall these be accomplished in spite of the "devices" of men, but that these very "devices" shall be rendered subservient to their accomplishment—that all that is human shall be so directed and overruled, as to effect what is divine. Many and striking are the exemplifications of this in the records of inspired history:—and these records contain a specimen of the *principles* by which the divine administration of the government of the world is still, and shall to the end be, conducted. Look at the "device" which was in the hearts of Joseph's brethren:—"They said one to another, Behold this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and *we shall see what will become of his dreams!*"* These words were uttered with a bitter sneer—with a "leer malign" upon their countenances, as their eyes glanced to each other, and their jealous and resentful pride kindled the more. They were devising, as they thought, the most effectual means for frustrating all that those dreams had seemed to import:—there should be an end of them *now*. And no doubt, *had* they fulfilled their present purpose, an end to them there had been. But so it was not to be. There were *other* "devices" suggested—"Shed no blood," said Reuben, "but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him;"—and then there was that of Judah—"What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him."* This their last "device" they thought as likely to be effectual in bringing his presumptuous dreams to nothing as their first. But what was the result?—"the counsel of the Lord, *that stood.*" This act of theirs was the very means of accomplishing it. How speaks Joseph himself to them *twenty years afterward?*

* See Gen. xxxvii. 19—27.

—“Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: *for God did send me before you to preserve life.*”*—And what were all the “devices” which were framed and executed by the “wicked generation” that “crucified the Lord of glory?” When they had taken their counsels, had got Judas successfully bribed, had got possession of their victim, and by intimidation of Pilate, had obtained his sentence of death, and had “nailed him to the tree;”—did they, by all this,—carried out by them in the freedom and the guilt of their lawless passions,—frustrate any purpose of heaven? “The counsel of the Lord, *that stood:*”—“Him, being delivered by the *determinate counsel* and foreknowledge of God,” said Peter to them afterwards, ye “have taken, and *by wicked hands* have crucified and slain.”† And thus it is in every event. Jehovah, the Universal Ruler, carries forward the designs of His providence, great and small, amidst, and by means of, the infinitely varying and crossing, the apparently conflicting, capricious, and random volitions and determinations of agents, who, all the while, feel themselves free, and who, in all that is necessary to moral responsibility, *are* free,—acting under no mechanical impulses or destinations of fatalism, but doing what they please, as disposition and motive influence them, without restraint and without compulsion! “Such knowledge is too wonderful for us.” Every attempt to comprehend it quite overpowers us. It is one of those many things in the moral world, as there are many too in the physical, which make us feel the limitation of our faculties, and, if rightly considered and improved, may impress us with a becoming and salutary “humbleness of mind.”

I have said that the operation of this truth may be often painful. We are naturally fond of *our own* “devices.” We fancy them wise. We anticipate from them the most beneficial results; and we dwell on the anticipation with delight. But impediments come in the way. Obstacles present themselves, and sometimes from quarters whence we least ex-

* Gen. xlv. 5.

† Acts ii. 23.

pected them, and where their occurrence occasions us the bitterest disappointment. Our great difficulty *then* is to see *the hand of God*,—or to retain the firm conviction that “all things are of HIM.” Yet *so assuredly it is*. “Clouds and darkness” may be “round about him.” This is the trial of our faith. There will be light in the end—all light—He will give us to see that “His counsel has stood,” and that it has been well for us that our “devices” have *not*.

We must not, on the other hand, forget, that while God in mercy frustrates many of our “devices,” that “His counsel may stand,” it is sometimes a part of His counsel to chasten His people, both individually and socially, by allowing their “devices” and plans to *succeed*. He may frustrate the purpose of one, and give effect to the opposite purpose of another. In *both* ways He may chasten; or the one may be favour, and the other correction,—correction, such as may not be felt at the time, but felt in all its bitterness afterwards.

Verse 22. “The desire of a man is his kindness: and a poor man is better than a liar.”—The meaning commonly affixed to this verse is probably the true one—that *kindness* is to be measured by the amount of a man’s *desires* to do good, rather than by the amount of his *ability*. Any other principle of estimate would be most unfair in regard to a very numerous class of our fellow-men. There may be a great deal of genuine and generous kindness in the heart of a poor man, who has nothing beyond desires and wishes in his power. The heart may be full, when the hand is empty. In this respect, the Bible principle is that of the purest equity—“It is required according to what a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.”

But let it be observed and remembered—“the desires of a man are *not* his kindness,” when he has the *ability* to be practically kind, and *confines himself to desires*. No. In that case, there is the clearest of all evidence that the desire is *not sincere*;—mere profession, without reality—“love *in word*”—which is only another phrase for no love at all,*

* Comp. James ii. 15, 16,

While, therefore, there are cases in which we cheerfully, according to a common phrase, “take the *will* for the *deed*,” knowing that there is a want of ability to do what the heart wishes,—there are other cases, in which we demand the *deed* as the only proof of the *will*,—the *gift* as the only evidence of the *charity*. The poor man, who is sincerely willing and desirous to serve us, had he but the power, is as much entitled to our lively and affectionate gratitude as if he had actually done us the service.

Such, in this connexion, seems to be the import of the second clause of the verse—“A *poor* man is better than a *liar*.”—The liar is the hypocritical and empty promiser; the man of many words, but no deeds,—of large and flattering assurances, but no performance. The poor man, who is sincere in his kind desires, is “*better*”—better incomparably *in himself*, in the sterling principles of his character; and better *to us*, in the comfort and satisfaction imparted to our minds in our times of need,—than the man who talks as if his whole heart were love, but who proves by his conduct that his heart is all in his tongue, and that it is there only to teach it to lie;—the man who gives us to expect much, but from whom nothing is obtained; who turns out “a cloud without water;” or—to use the apt comparison of Job respecting his friends,—is like the “stream of the brooks” in the parched and burning desert, that rapidly passes away, and balks the eager anticipations of the thirsty and fainting caravan. The true sense, therefore, seems to be given by an interpreter and translator, who renders the verse freely—“The glory of a man is his beneficence; but better is the poor man than he that falsely professeth it.”* This rendering indeed, of the former part of the verse proceeds on the supposition of “*desire*” meaning *that which is the object of desire*;—and so it is understood by others. An eminent critic renders—“That which is desirable, or praiseworthy, in a man, is his kindness or beneficence.”† I prefer the sense we have before put on this part of the verse. And, from the

* Hodgson.

† Schulz.

whole, we should learn, first, to beware ourselves of all false, lying, hypocritical professions of kindness,—of which the sincerity is not evinced by the gift and act. The mouth and the purse are far from being always equally open. On the contrary, it is often where most is said that least is done; and where there are fewest words that most is got. Let us be of those who say little and do much, rather than of those who say much and do little. And we should further learn to be just to all, in our estimates of their “kindness.” We are in great danger of forming our estimates, and cherishing our feelings of gratitude, according to the amount of relief or of benefit actually obtained and enjoyed by ourselves. Yet it is the “*kindness*,” not the mere *gift* considered in itself, that should be the measure of our gratitude. When a man pinches himself to help us, but can do comparatively little, we are more indebted to him than to the man who may give largely, and yet hardly touch even his superfluity.

There is another sense—closely connected with the one which the clause preceding suggests—in which “a poor man is better than a liar.” Men may not only lie in their *promises to give*; they may lie as a *means of getting*. Now, it is better far that a man remain poor, than that he make rich by *lying*,—that is, by any false, deceptive, dishonourable means. Yes, ye upright poor, it *is* better—far, far better for your reputation, for your peace of conscience, for your trust in Providence, and even for the probabilities of your ultimately getting on in the world. On your “*honest poverty*” rests the smile of Heaven; and the very *sense of your integrity* places you in regard to respectability and happiness immeasurably above the man who is rich at the expense of *truth*.

Verse 23. “The fear of the Lord tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.—*Supplements*, in any translation, generally indicate some degree of obscurity in the original. There *is* obscurity in the middle clause of this verse where our translators have supplied—*he who hath it*; a supplement which is sufficiently bold. The word for *satisfied* may be either the verb *to be full*, or the adjective *full* or *filled*. The word

rendered "*abide*," may signify to *pass the night*—to *lie down*—to *rest*.

From these significations of the different words, various have been the senses affixed to the clause. "*The full*" has been understood of those who are full of prosperity and the pride which it engenders; and by an alteration in the connexion of the words in the latter part of the verse, it has been made to declare of him, that "he shall lie down in it, and that he shall be visited with evil." But this interpretation, like one or two others, does not seem at all natural or satisfactory.

To myself it appears, that, taking the word for "*satisfied*" more literally as meaning *full* or *filled*, and the word for *abide* as signifying *rest*, or passing the night in quietness and peace—the verse might be rendered—"The fear of the Lord is unto life; and *he who is filled with it shall rest*; he shall not be visited with evil." The sense is thus not materially different from that of our received version.

The idea is the delightful one of felt security—tranquil, settled repose and serenity of spirit, from confidence in God's wisdom, faithfulness, and power, and an assured sense of His love. While in person, in family, and in substance, the fearer of God is not exempt from trials: while he has sufferings, and feels them, and they are not, in themselves, to him more than to others, "joyous, but grievous"—yet in them "he is not visited with *evil*;" for that is not really evil, which is the divinely ordained means of his greatest good. He knows—"that cannot hurt which comes from God." He knows that there is not a power in the universe that can "visit him with evil," independently of God's will;—for "if God be for him, who can be against him?" And if the "evil" that comes, comes under the direction of His will, the gracious nature of the purpose for which it is sent, changes, in the estimation of the sufferer, its very character—transmuting it into good:—temporal privation being spiritual acquisition; the pains of the body, the health of the soul; the sufferings of time, the preparatives for eternity. Thus—"the fear of the Lord is unto life"—tending to the enjoyment

of the present life; and, springing as it does from the faith of divine truth, to the final attainment of "life everlasting."

Verse 24. "A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again."—It is agreed among critics, that the word translated *bosom* ought to be rendered, according to its more direct and literal signification—*dish*.^{*} And, so understood, it is hardly possible to conceive a stronger or more graphic description of the sluggard:—he "droppeth his hand into the dish, it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth."—Indolent, lazy men are generally fond enough of their meat; but they like their ease even better. They would fain make the two compatible, and have their meat without the trouble of taking it. O! if it would but just drop into their mouth! You have here the poor yawning wretch at his meal. It is quite a toil to him. Having got a mouthful, he lets his hand drop heavily into the dish; and, while his jaws go lazily about the process of mastication, it is long before he can be at the trouble to raise it again with another. It is literally with him, according to the proverb—"Slow at meat—slow at work."

But there is a general sentiment under the particular figure. The sentiment is, that indolence, growing upon its miserable subject, comes to feel even the very slightest exertion, however necessary, an insufferable annoyance. A good may be within immediate reach—quite at hand—the smallest possible trouble may obtain it; yet it will remain unsecured. The opportunity will pass. He will yawn, and wish, and resolve, but do nothing—still saying "*time enough!*"—till it is gone; and then, having yawned out his ineffective wishes, he will, in the same spirit of listlessness, yawn out again his unavailing regrets. Or perhaps he may fall back on *fatalism*—a system most congenial to the spirit of sloth, and find out that it was not *ordained* that he should have the thing!

* See 2 Kings xxi. 13; 2 Chr. xxxv. 13.

Verse 25. "Smite a scorner, and the simple will beware; and reprove one that hath understanding, and he will understand knowledge." Observe here—1. There is an intended contrast, in the two clauses of the verse, between *smiting* and *reproving*: the one signifying the severity of punitive discipline, the other simply verbal admonition and rebuke. The former required in the case of the froward "scorner;" the latter only in the case of the "man of understanding."—2. The *scorner* and the *simple*, in the first clause, are understood by some of the same person:—"Smite a scorner, and *the infatuated man* will beware."* The "*scorner*," however, in other parts of this book, as we have more than once seen, is distinguished by the very fact of his incorrigibility in his self-willed frowardness: "A reproof entereth more into a wise man than a *hundred stripes* into a fool." It is much more likely that by "*the simple*" we are to understand, not the "scorner" himself, but those who are in danger of being brought under his influence, and corrupted by his example. They are those—the young especially—who are not yet hackneyed in evil; who have not yet learned to "mock at sin," but who are exposed to the peril of the wayward and hardened "scorner's" power over them. Although we would be far from laying down the principle that any man should be punished *beyond his desert* for the sake of others;—that a heavier infliction should be laid upon him than his crime will at all justify, merely that the *in terrorem* example may have the more powerful effect; yet it is a perfectly legitimate motive for the infliction, promptly and firmly, of such punishment as *is* deserved, that *others* may be warned, and may be dissuaded from similar courses; or, in the language of our criminal courts, "may be deterred from such crimes in all time coming." To go beyond desert, would be unjust; it would be injuring one man for the benefit of others; it would be "doing evil, that good might come." But that the warning of others is a legitimate end in the infliction of merited punishment, is universally admitted; and it has the

* Schultens

sanction of God's word.* *Simplicity*, when taken as at all meaning what is evil, signifies *inconsideration—heedlessness*. "The simple will *beware*"—literally "*will be cunning*"—means their being *put on their guard*, so as to apply a caution as artful to repel seduction as the guile employed to seduce them.—3. While the punishment of the "scorner" benefits *others*, the reproof of the wise man benefits *himself*. He takes it in good part, and profits by it.

Verse 26. "He that wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach." On reading this verse, we are ready to start, and to exclaim—A son "*that wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother!*" Can such a monster exist? Can there be one who thus resists the strongest impulses, and belies the tenderest claims of his nature?—Would that the character existed only in fancy! It was a reality in Solomon's time; it is a reality in ours. Amongst the black and base characters, of which catalogues are at times given in the word of God, "*without natural affection*" is one. It is not the mere waywardness and passion of childhood that is meant in this description. Oh! it is something incomparably worse than that! We have here before us a youth, who has fallen into habits of profligacy—who casts off parental restraint, as unworthy the regard of a *lad of spirit*; who, for the gratification of his foolish extravagancies and his expensive vices, "*wastes his father,*" making free, in every way in which he can lay his hand on it, with his substance, reckless if he should bring both him and the family to poverty;—who "*chases away his mother,*" driving her from him, when, even with the tears of maternal love she would expostulate and plead with him; caring for nothing but *coercion*, and taking advantage of her known inability to use it; scorning her tears—it may be her *widowed* tears,—tears with which tears of kindred sympathy have ceased to flow, and whose tender pleadings there is now no sterner authority to enforce!—Such youths, alas! the fatal power of evil has

* See Deut. xiii. 11; xxi. 21.

made ;—and such youths “*cause shame, and bring reproach.*” They are a scandal to their parents and their families ; and a nuisance to society :—and their doom is reprobation and ignominy, as the merited consequence to themselves. The youth who can so use a *mother*—is “fit for treasons.” There is not a crime in the whole catalogue of infamy, of which I cannot suppose him capable ; nor is there any symptom more sadly portentous, of a life of crime, and a death of shame and misery.

In the verse we have what may be regarded as the extreme of the evil. It is evidently susceptible of many intermediate degrees : and they are *all bad*.—Of what Solomon calls “wasting a father” some youths are apt to form a very false idea of the wickedness. The circumstance of its being their father’s property they are appropriating and squandering, makes them think of their conduct with comparative lightness. Yet if *wrong* is to be measured by the amount of obligation to the party wronged, in what case can the crime be more atrocious than in that of a son robbing a father ?—And let every child and every young person hearing me beware—as they value their own peace of mind, the approbation and esteem of men, and the favour of God,—of acting such a part as would send one pang to the heart, or draw one tear of bitterness to the eye, of the mother that bare them. O ! knew you but a tithe of what you owe to that maternal fondness that watched and wept over your cradle ; would you appreciate the meltings, the solitudes, the fears, the hopes, the sorrows, the joys of a mother’s bosom,—affection for that mother would be the last of the affections that could take leave of your hardening heart ; its warm drops the last that the iron hand of vice could wring out of it.

There appears to be a connexion between this verse and that which follows—“Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge.” In regard to the young, who have, under parental tuition, received “the words of knowledge,”—the knowledge that teaches them the “fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom,” and lays them under the restraints, the salutary restraints, of

the divine law,—not unfrequently does it happen, that the delusive reasonings and sophistical plausibilities of scepticism and infidelity,—supporting as they do a system that has many recommendations to the carnal mind, and aiming at the unsettling and subversion of that which, though it has the secret sanction of *conscience*, is far from palatable to the natural inclinations of the *heart*,—serve to undermine the influence, and to loosen the hold, of better lessons. The lies of systems of error, like the *first* lie itself, have generally in them something fascinating,—something that the wayward heart likes, and which gives a deceptive colouring and speciousness to the arguments by which they are maintained. They are agreeable and insinuating. Their advocates season them with wit, and impart to them the aspect of great liberality of spirit and freedom from restraint,—a restraint which is represented, tauntingly, as unmanly, and fit only for the nursery and the leading-strings of childhood. This is all very taking and bewitching to young, inconsiderate, and hardly settled minds. When such principles enter, and get hold of the passions, and through the passions bribe and corrupt the understanding, restraint is thrown off—timidly, it may be, at first, but with a growing scorn and boldness;—the reins are cast on the necks of the passions; a course of self-indulgence, in every way that vice and fancy dictate, is pursued; the family patrimony is invaded and squandered; a mother's tenderness,—the tenderness of remonstrance and tears, is indignantly resisted;—he “wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother.”—I am fully persuaded, that in by far the greater number of cases, the principles of *action* are corrupted before the principles of *belief*; that the first thing is, the “putting away of a good conscience” by temptation to *sin*, and then the “making shipwreck of faith.” Enticements are held out, in various ways, to that which is evil. The evil is done. The conscience is for the time ill at ease. But the evil is sweet, and it is repeated. Conscience drives its stings still more tormentingly into the bosom. The fretfulness and sullenness of self-dissatisfaction ensue. But conscience gets gradually seared. The emol-

lients of self-flattering error are applied to its wounds. The principles are accommodated to the practice. He who began in vice ends in infidelity. And the final result is, a course of wild and ungovernable licentiousness.

Mark, then, ye youth, the counsel now before you; the counsel of human experience,—the counsel of compassionate kindness,—the counsel of divine authority:—"Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge." CEASE. If you have ventured to open your ear, shut it now; and open it to "the words of knowledge"—the words of *divine* instruction.

Verse 28. "An ungodly witness scorneth judgment; and the mouth of the wicked devoureth iniquity."—Observe here—that the designation "*an ungodly witness*" is, on the margin, "a witness of Belial." Sons of Belial is a common appellation of impious and unprincipled men. "A *witness* of Belial," or "an ungodly witness"—is not, I think, to be understood, in this connexion, of a witness called to give evidence in a cause, between parties, before magistrates or arbitrators. The two parts of the verse, taken together, appear to contain a very apt description of the characters of those alluded to in the previous verse—by whose "instruction" the youth are made "to err from the words of knowledge;" men, who, instead of witnessing for God, witness for Belial—that is for wickedness and folly personified; all whose conversation is on the side of evil,—their testimony, by word and act, favourable to it, and unfavourable to goodness, and to the great concentration and prototype of all goodness. The verse, then, contains the character of those from whose counsel the young are warned to cease. They are men who vaunt themselves of their freedom from the restraints of law and justice,—laugh at scruples of conscience,—cast away the cords of authority,—set at nought threatened judgments; their "*mouth devoureth iniquity*,"—opening wide to receive, and greedily and voraciously swallowing down the pleasures of sin and of the world. And the closing verse presents a warning to flee their counsel—verse 29. "Judgments are prepared for scorers, and stripes for the

back of fools." "*Judgments*" are not merely temporal chastisements—those visitations of Heaven which sometimes overtake the God-defying sinner even in the present life:—they are to be understood more especially of those final and fearful "judgments" which are denounced from heaven against all the workers of iniquity—the "*scorners*" and the "*fools*."—"Scorners" are those who tempt and seduce; and "fools" are those who listen and yield to their seducing temptations, and follow them in their evil courses. The former shall be "beaten with many stripes." But the latter shall not escape. Having cast in their lot with them here, they must lay their account with sharing it too hereafter. And both the one and the other shall suffer according to the amount of light and privilege they have respectively enjoyed. O how powerfully does all this recommend and enforce the advice—or rather the authoritative though gracious injunction—"Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge!" Cease—as you would avoid the judgments and the stripes of offended holiness and omnipotence. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"

In conclusion—Let all, young and old, remember, that there is *one* point, in regard to which, let what devices soever be in their hearts, "*the counsel of the Lord—that shall stand.*" God has fixed the way of a sinner's salvation. He has made it known in His word. There you find His counsel in this matter,—*the first of all* to you, both in order and in importance. It stands there, the unchanging counsel of the unchanging God. He can never depart from it. It is framed in adaptation to the glory of His own character and government, and to the exigencies of man's condition. It admits not of alteration. It cannot be improved; it must not be modified. As the counsel of God for a certain end, it is the only counsel by which that end can be answered. "BY GRACE ARE YE SAVED, THROUGH FAITH"—faith in Christ—faith in the righteousness and atonement of a divine Saviour. This—and this alone is the counsel of God, for your salvation.

LECTURE LVII.

PROV. XX. 1.

"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."

It is now nearly five years since, in illustrating the "fruits of the Spirit" enumerated by Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians, I called your attention, in three discourses, to the subject of *temperance*. It is by no means my purpose to enter into the subject at so much length at present, or to attempt anything like what might be called a full discussion either of the claims of the *total abstinence system*, or of the merits, on the one side or the other, of what has now been technically denominated the *wine question*. All that I intend is, as briefly and as simply as I can, to collect, upon two or three points, the lights of Scripture; and to do this in such a manner as to show that even to ordinary readers of the Bible, there is no difficulty in the matter, if they will only bring to the inquiry the principles of sound and unprejudiced common sense.

The text brings before us three things:

1. *Certain articles*—"Wine and strong drink:"
2. *Certain tendencies* ascribed to them:—"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging:"—and
3. The *folly of yielding* to these tendencies,—"*Whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.*"

I. We have *two articles*—"Wine and strong drink:"—and, since the introduction of recent discussions on the abstinence question, the English reader has got so familiar with the original Hebrew terms, that it has ceased to be

pedantry, and has become almost necessary, to use them. —The word for wine is *yayin*:—the word for strong drink *shekhar*. In not a few of the publications on the subject, we have page after page bedizened with the characters of Hebrew and Chaldee, and Arabic, and Syriac and Greek—and with the words of these various languages in English letters. We have, at the same time, minute and multiform descriptions of the various processes to which, in ancient times and countries, the juice of the grape was subjected,—of the different articles produced by these processes, and the several modes in which they were respectively used. All this possesses a certain description of interest. It is gratifying to the curiosity both of the critic and the etymologist; of the naturalist, the chemist, and the man of general information. But considered as bearing on the answer to the question—What, in Scripture language, is meant by “*wine*” and “*strong drink*,”—especially the former?—it does appear to me to be, to a great extent, a *waste of learning*. What is a plain man to make of his Bible, if on so seemingly simple a subject as the use and abuse of intoxicating drinks, he finds himself wrapt in a cloud of learned dust about the very meaning of the words in which his duty and his danger are pointed out to him? Further; how useful and desirable soever it may be to trace terms to their etymological origin, it should not be forgotten, that even the clearest ascertainment of this, is very far from being a sure and satisfactory way of determining the *meaning* of a word:—that depending so much on particular associations at the time when the term is specifically applied, and varying greatly in the progress of every language. It is by *usage alone*,—and usage undergoing changes far from slight at times, in the history of the language,—that the *true sense* of any term can be ascertained.

There are different words employed, in the Old Testament, to express, under various modifications, beverages or preparations from the vine. By some, *seven* are enumerated; by others, even *nine* or *ten*. One of them is the *second* of those in our text—the *shekhar*. This word, however, is more general, meaning “strong drink” of any description, whether

the material from which it is made be the fruit of the vine or any other substance:—and respecting the import of *it*, as always used for what is intoxicating, there is no dispute. Setting it, therefore, in the meanwhile, aside, there are of all the rest *two only* which, on the present question, call for any remark. They are the former of the two words in my text—*yayin*, and the word *tirosh*.

Yayin is supposed to be derived from the verb which signifies to *squeeze* or *press*; an etymology natural and simple, —this being the process by which the juice, which is the material of the wine, is obtained from the fruit. Of *tirosh* different etymologies are given;—the one, from the verb signifying to *possess* or *take full possession*; by which its influence on the man who freely uses it is conceived to be strongly conveyed: it takes possession of him, so that he is no longer himself or under his own control. It has been thought, indeed, that, from this etymology, *tirosh* may simply mean *vineyards*, considered as the symbol, by a part for the whole, of a man's *possessions*, *property*, or *inheritance*. But this wont do. *Tirosh*, beyond all question, means a particular *drink*. This is its ordinary import. And men do not drink their vineyards any more than they eat their lands. Another derivation of the word is from the term signifying *head*. And if this were the true etymology, it would seem to me much more likely that the association by which it was suggested was still the *influence* of the liquor,—its *headiness*, its effect in unsettling the understanding,—than any resemblance between the *head* and the *berry* or *cluster*. But, as I have said, it is not etymology, but *usage* that must settle the question. Etymology seems to favour the intoxicating properties of the *tirosh* as well as of the *yayin*. In considering the question of *usage*, I begin with the latter.

Yayin is the word in our text, and there can be no doubt of its intoxicating character in *this* occurrence of it. It is, I may say, *the* word for *wine* in the Old Testament Scriptures. The word for the same thing, in the Greek, the Latin, the German, the Dutch, the English, and other European languages, is a derivative from it,—or rather is the very same

term appropriately varied. It occurs about one hundred and forty times in the Hebrew Bible:—and it denotes, almost *invariably*, the *fermented juice of the grape*; and of course an intoxicating beverage when taken in excess. I have said “almost invariably.” I might suppress the qualifying *almost*; for the alleged *exceptions* are on no legitimate principle of criticism to be regarded as such. They are Isa. xvi. 10; Jer. xlviii. 33:—“Gladness is taken away, and joy out of the plentiful field; and in the vineyards there shall be no singing, neither shall there be shouting: the treaders shall tread out no *wine* in their presses; I have made their vintage-shouting to cease.” “Joy and gladness is taken from the plentiful field, and from the land of Moab; and I have caused *wine* to fail from the wine-presses: none shall tread with shouting; their shouting shall be no shouting.” To say that in such passages the *yayin* signifies the *grape-juice* while in the process of expression, is incorrect,—proceeding on a principle of strict literality which cannot be admitted. It clearly means the wine anticipated as the result of the process;—on a principle universal in language. The gardeners and vinedressers of Germany are said to call their *grapes in the cluster*, at this day, *their wine*. A principle of interpretation so literal would yield curious results; such as, that the Israelites fed on corn without its being baked into bread, because Jehovah says—“I should have fed them with the *finest of the wheat*,” and that the *manna* was, in like manner, eaten as it fell, without any culinary process, because it is called *bread*—God promising to “rain *bread* from heaven” upon them.

Yayin, then, (the proper word for *wine*,) signified *fermented or intoxicating wine*. Yet observe—

This is the wine that was used in the *ordinances of ancient ceremonial worship*. It was the *drink-offering* which was enjoined to be presented, in various quantities, with the animal sacrifices. It is invariably—and you are aware how frequent the ceremony was—the *yayin*.

Observe further:—This *yayin* is, on various occasions, *promised as a divine bestowment and blessing*;—and the de-

privation of it, on the other hand, *threatened as a judicial calamity*. It is true, that the word *tirosh* is also used, and it may be even more frequently, in similar connexions. What of that? It is enough that *both* are used, without discrimination, when the blessing is promised, and when the judgment is denounced.*

Again:—In various instances, when God is giving promises of blessing, *both* words are used in association with *corn and oil*, and other articles of sustenance,—whether of necessity or of comfort. It is not the *tirosh* only that is thus associated and thus promised. The *yayin* is in the same predicament. It is, therefore, a point of fact, about which there can be no reasonable doubt, that God promises as a *good*, as a *blessing*, that which possessed *intoxicating qualities*. The reason and principle are very plain. He promises that of which the *use* (for which alone it was given) was a benefit,—but of which the abuse (which was the result not of God's goodness, but of man's perversion of it,) was prejudicial. How few gifts of God are there, of which, on one ground or another, the same thing might not be said?

Again:—The law of the Nazarite laid him under an interdiction during the period of his vow, as to the use of wine, and of whatever came of the vine:—but whenever his vow ceased, the same authority gave him liberty to take wine. The restriction neither existed before nor after the time of his vow. Mark too the permission given, in certain specified circumstances,—when any Jews resided at a distance from Jerusalem (Deut. xiv. 24—26.) And mark also the more than permission, (as indeed the language referred to also was,) the encouraging direction given to the pious Israelite, when he complied with divine counsels, under the influence of principles and motives that were well-pleasing in God's sight:—"Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works," Eccles. ix. 7.

* I refer for the use of *yayin*, in such connexions, to Gen. xlix. 11, 12; Psalm civ. 15; Hos. xiv. 7; Amos ix. 14; and Deut. xxviii. 39,

There is no proof whatever that the *tirosk* was not intoxicating when used to excess, as well as the *yayin*. We have seen that the etymology rather favours its having been so. And as to the effects actually ascribed to it, one passage alone, were there no other, should be enough to satisfy every unprejudiced mind:—"Whoredom, and wine, and new wine, take away the heart," Hos. iv. 11. The "*new wine*" here is *tirosk*:—and I can imagine nothing more unworthy of all candour,—more an outrage on all fair and honourable criticism,—than the attempt to show that, in such a connexion, *tirosk* may mean no more than the luxury of *syrup of grapes and water*, the harmless refreshment of a summer's day!—as if we were to say, when denouncing the vicious causes of alienation from God and moral destruction—"Whoredom, and strong drink, and *lemonade*!" The truth is, if any distinction is to be made between the *yayin* and the *tirosk*, the "*wine*" and the "*new wine*"—in such a passage, we must proceed on the principle of *climax*, and consider the latter as the stronger of the two!

The *yayin* was also a common beverage in use by the best of men. It was *this* that Melchisedec the king of Salem brought out to Abraham on his return from the slaughter of the kings: and on various occasions, "bottles," or *skinfuls*, "of wine"—of *yayin*,—form a part of the supplies provided for the sustenance and refreshment of those standing in need of such supplies, when hungry, athirst, and weary.

The example of the *Rechabites* is a favourite one with our total abstinence brethren; and some of them have even adopted the designation. With what propriety, a glance at the case is enough to show.*—It is not at all, you will observe, their *abstinence from wine* that is the subject of the divine commendation. We are not even certain whether Jonadab their father was justifiable in laying them under this interdict or not. The ground of commendation is simply their *obedience to their father*; which Jehovah, justly and pointedly sets in contrast with the ungrateful and unnatural

* Jer. xxxv. 1—10,

rebellion of His people.—And further, Why do not the admirers and professed imitators of the Rechabites *dwell in tents*, as well as abstain from wine? There is the very same ground for the one as there is for the other.

It seems to me, then, an utterly vain attempt to make it out that the *wine* of the Old Testament, under whichever designation mentioned, was without intoxicating properties. The question is not at all whether other articles were prepared from grapes, and were in common use. This is granted. That the Hebrews, like certain other peoples, were in the practice of boiling down the juice of grapes to one-third or one-half its quantity, and bringing it to the consistence of a syrup, who cares to question? Be it so. Two things require to be noticed:—first, that in no passage of the Old Testament scriptures do we ever find any allusion whatever to any such practice, or to the use of such syrup as a beverage;—and secondly, that this *syrup and water*, supposing it in use, was no more the liquor called in the Old Testament *wine*, than *molasses and water* would, in the West Indies, be the liquor called *rum*.

It is at once and freely admitted, that the ordinary wines of Palestine were not *so* intoxicating as the brandied wines of Europe. What is contended for is, simply the point of fact that they were intoxicating;—and no reader of the scriptures of the Old Testament, who observes with what frequency *wine* and *drunkenness* are there associated,—and how often the *wine* stands in union, and, as it were, identification, with *strong drink*, in the production, by its abuse, of this monstrous evil of inebriation, can be at any loss as to the conclusion to which he should come. It will not do, first to fill ourselves with a horror of the *thing itself*, on account of the abuse of it; and thence to conclude that such a thing *could not possibly* be promised and bestowed as a blessing; and then to set to work an ingenuity, of which the principle and motive may be good, but of which the ultimate tendency is most mischievous, to strain words and force distinctions, to bring the meaning into harmony with our previous conceptions. Our proper business is, to take facts,

as they stand plainly before us; and, if these facts cannot be made to harmonize with certain principles which we have adopted respecting good and evil, and the conduct becoming the divine Being, to rest assured that in these principles there is an error. The facts should correct the judgment.

I come now to the language of the New Testament. I might almost say, there is there but *one word for wine*. It is just the Hebrew word *Græcised*. In one instance, that word is accompanied with the epithet *unmixed*; where the epithet evidently means—*undiluted*—in all its strength. It is where the wine is the emblem of divine wrath:—"The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation," Rev. xiv. 10. In only two instances does *another designation for wine itself* occur. The first—"Others mocking, said, These men are full of new wine," Acts ii. 13. In this passage *new wine* is not the literal nor proper rendering. It should be "*sweet wine*;" there being then, as now, differences in the mode of preparation, by which some of the wines were rendered sweet and others not. At that time of the year there could not be had what is properly termed "*new wine*." It is thought to have been a strong sweet spiced wine—with honey and pepper. The only other exception from the use of the common Greek word for wine is in the institution of the Lord's Supper; where Jesus calls it "*the fruit*," or *produce*, "*of the vine*." I call it *one instance of exception*, because, although it occurs in three of the evangelists, it is only the record by three historians of what was but *once said*.

The question, then, is—What is the meaning of this word—not etymologically, but according to its *actual use* in the inspired narrative? There is a passage which brings us directly to this point:—"No man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. No man also, having drunk old wine, straightway desireth new; for he saith, The old is better," Luke v. 37—39. I need not say, this is *fermented wine*. It will not do to say that the

putting of it into new and strong skins was to *prevent fermentation*. There *is* fermentation; and it is the strong working of the fermentation that renders new bottles necessary, to prevent the loss of both bottles and wine. If any thing further were needed in proof of this, it is to be found in the thirty-ninth verse:—inasmuch as *old unfermented* must, or wine, could *never* be *better* than *new*:—it is only of *fermented* wine that the saying could be true. The *newer* and *sweeter* the must, the better, if it is *unfermented*.

To those who know their New Testament I need not say, that its *oinos*—its *wine*—is ever represented as possessing inebriating properties.* In the character of *bishops and deacons*, mark this particular feature: “Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous. Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre,” 1 Tim. iii. 3, 8. And—“For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre,” Tit. i. 7. Most assuredly, their not being *given to wine*—not *given to much wine*,—does not mean that they should not use it *at all*. The expressions *imply* the use, while they interdict the excess. Compare it with another feature of the same character in the passages just quoted, that they should not be “given to filthy lucre”—“greedy of filthy lucre” (the same word in the original). This does not mean that they never should touch money. So is it with the wine. *Moderation* in regard to both is the spirit of the injunctions; in opposition, in the one case, to covetousness, or that “love of money which is the root of all evil;” and, in the other, to inebriety and the disturbance of reason, or unnecessary waste.

We are entitled to take what our Lord says of wine, in the passage before quoted, as the *key* to all the occurrences of wine in the New Testament. We have seen that the key fits in regard to those already referred to. Let us look to another. It relates to the *character of Jesus himself*:—

* Compare, for example, Eph. v. 18; 1 Pet. iv. 3.

“John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! But Wisdom is justified of all her children,” Luke vii. 33—35. Here observe *first*, There is a contrast between the character of John and the character of Jesus. John was a recluse. He retired from society, and frequented the solitudes of the wilderness, living a life of abstinence from the social gratifications of human intercourse:—whereas Jesus went about among his countrymen, ate and drank with them, and on such occasions as he knew would prove suitable for his own gracious purposes, accepted invitations to be a guest at their tables. In the course pursued by John, he acted in accordance with the charges which had, by the angel of God, been given concerning him, before his birth—“He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb,” Luke i. 15. *Secondly*, no one will question the perfect rectitude of the character of Jesus. He conformed to ordinary practice in whatever could be done without sin. It follows, therefore, that there was *no sin in drinking wine*; no more than in *eating bread*;—the two things being mentioned together in the very same manner. The only question must regard the *nature of the wine* of which he partook, —which leads me to notice, *Thirdly*, that while, even were there no further proof, we are entitled to understand it of the wine spoken of by the same name in other parts of the New Testament, which, we have seen, was the ordinary fermented wine,—we *have* further evidence. It is in this very passage. It is in the fact of his having been slandered—as a “*wine-bibber*.” That this *was* a vile slander we of course assume. It was the misrepresentation of base malignity—the construction of what was perfectly innocent into a charge of evil. But if the wine in ordinary use had not been of an inebriating character, it would *not* have been such a charge. Had it been true, that the wine was of such

a quality, that a man might drink it as freely and copiously, without harm, as he might of "the water of the Ganges,"—then the designation of a wine-bibber would no more have been a reproach than that of a *water*-bibber. The fact, however, of his having conformed to ordinary practice in the use, not the abuse, of this divinely provided beverage, is to all Christians sufficient proof that there is no sin in it;—that *all* use is not abuse; and that they who employ strong and unqualified terms of reprobation of the use of wine, pronouncing water "the best and *only* drink, without question, which nature designed for man;" and exclaiming, in the spirit of indignant renunciation of anything stronger,—“give me the pure water—which the Saviour enjoyed at the well of Jacob!”—would do well to take heed, that they be not in effect bringing afresh against that Saviour the old slander. They surely forget themselves. While they thus extol the water, as the only beverage which nature has provided, and which the God of nature, by so providing it, sanctions, they may well blush at the recollection that the wine, as well as the water, was the drink of Him who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." Let them think *on whom* their charges and their taunts alight!

Let us now go to Cana of Galilee. You are all familiar with the facts of the "marriage in Cana of Galilee;" with the innocent festivities of that occasion, and the manner in which Jesus supplied the deficiency in the means of maintaining them. These feasts, as we learn from Old Testament history, were kept up for seven successive days. It is not unlikely that a larger number of guests had, on this occasion, come than had been expected. At what time of the feast we cannot say—but the company ran short of wine; and, by an act of miraculous power, Jesus furnished a supply which, from its extent, even on the most moderate computation, is conceived by many to have been intended to go beyond the limits of the feast, and to form a temporary stock for the newly-married pair.

Now here, as in a former case, there is a common way of *begging the question*. From the character of the Saviour, it

is at once inferred, with—I do not call it an affected, but a sincere and well-meant horror at the very supposition of the contrary,—that the wine thus produced could not possibly be wine with inebriating qualities. But this is far from being the fair way to take up such a case. It is assuming, what can never be granted, that to make for legitimate use an article that was liable to abuse, even although in the particular case there was no abuse of any kind, would have been inconsistent with our Lord's character. The question is still one of *fact*; and if we can ascertain the fact, we should humbly conclude that it was in harmony with the Saviour's character, and the imitation of it not to be hastily and harshly condemned in the disciples of that Saviour. Look, then, at the case. *First*, we are quite sure (thus much may with confidence be certainly inferred from the character of our Lord,) that there was not, on the occasion at which he was present,—I do not say *intoxication*, but any approach to inebriety or indecorum. To nothing of the kind, we may be assured, would He by his presence have given countenance, or the remotest appearance of sanction. And observe, the very language of “the ruler of the feast” respecting “the water that was made wine,” shows, that with regard to *him* at least there was at the time the perfect retention of his discriminating taste; and we have no reason to imagine that there was one in the company of whom the same thing was not true:—for, *Secondly*, this same language of “the ruler of the feast” clearly refers, *not* to what had at the time taken place, but only to what was *customary*, on similar occasions, among the men of the world. And then, *thirdly*, mark what he says—“Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now,” John ii. 10. It will not be disputed that the designation “*good wine*” means, in both of its occurrences, wine possessing the same qualities in a similar or superior degree. Now it is very evident, that the setting forth of the inferior wine “*after men have well drunk*” is to be explained from the inebriating quality of the “good wine” having begun to be so far experienced as to im-

pair that delicacy of taste, and that particular attention to what they were drinking, and so to prevent the change from being observed. "The *good wine*," therefore, spoken of as usually produced at the beginning of a feast, was fermented, inebriating wine:—and if so, "the *good wine*" now produced by the Saviour must have been of the same description. If any man shudders at this, he shudders at a shadow—at a phantom of his own imagination. He is weak enough to forget the distinction between *use* and *abuse*; between wine as given by God to "make glad the heart of man," and wine as taken in the excesses of sensuality, and to the unsettling of sober reason. The man who feels thus, should not be able to bear the sight of *money*, seeing nothing can be worse in its results than that which is "the root of all evil;" and yet "*money answereth all things*"—good ends as well as bad:—the evils arise from its abuse,—whether in the excess of the desire after it, or in the extravagance, the meanness, or the turpitude of its application. All that can be concluded from the incident, as recorded, is, that our divine Lord graced and honoured and blessed with his personal presence the innocent festivities of a connubial party, probably within the circle of his mother's kindred; and that He supplied to the full, by miracle, the means of its enjoyment. This is enough. Had such a thing been wrong in himself, Jesus never would have done it. Had such a thing been wrong in his followers, He never would have given them the countenance of his example, or his countenance in any way, in the doing of it.

There is no light in which the strong language that has been used against the use of wine or of anything that can intoxicate, has shocked and grieved me more, than when I regard it in its bearing upon the character and conduct of my Lord and Master. I take the most lenient and charitable view in my power, when I impute to inconsideration and to hasty zeal for a favourite cause, the terms of unmeasured and indiscriminating censure with which some good men have condemned the use, and especially the social use, of wine; their banishing it from their tables, and from their houses;

and their having brought themselves under a solemn pledge not to take, nor give, nor offer, what was taken, and given, and offered, and even miraculously created, for social use, by Him whom they profess to regard as having, in all things, "left them an example, that they should follow his steps!" Surely, surely, fellow-Christians who have taken such a position may well be startled at the presumption involved in it. It is matter of no light concern, to occupy ground that, if just, reflects upon the conduct of the Christian's Lord,—and sets the disciple "above his Master." This is a *transcendentalism* in morals, at which I should feel it *impiety* to aim!

There is one other point to which, before closing, I must advert. It was my wish and intention to have finished the whole subject in one discourse:—but the second and third heads are of too great practical importance to be thrust into so narrow a corner as must remain when I have finished the first. The point to which I have alluded is—the question as to *the wine used in the institution of the Lord's supper*.—Much has of late been made of this question; a great deal more, in my apprehension, than its importance warrants. Why should it be at all necessary to ascertain the precise kind of wine, any more than the precise kind of bread? The wine used was that used in the paschal solemnity; and doubtless this was the ordinary *yayin*, the fermented wine of the country. Some indeed have fancied that the exclusion of *leaven* during that solemnity extended to *fermented* liquors as well as to the "leaven of bread." We have, however, pretty clear proof to the contrary in the fact, that on the morrow after the passover, the quarter-*hin* of *yayin*, or fermented wine, was to be the libation, or drink-offering with the enjoined sacrifice; and that the *hin* of the same wine was to be offered day by day as usual, during the days of unleavened bread, as at other times. And if it was the ordinary wine of the country, should not that which *we* use be the same? We properly conform to the custom of the country in other particulars. We *sit*, because it is our ordinary posture at table, without ever deeming it necessary to conform to theirs, which was *reclining*. We observe our

Sabbath from morning to morning, instead of from evening to evening, because the mode of reckoning the day differs with us from what it was with them. Why, then, any scruple about the use of whatever is the ordinary wine of the country?

But I shall be told, it is *not called wine at all*:—it is “*the fruit of the vine*.”—I feel it difficult to fancy those in earnest, who gravely found anything on this. If “*the fruit of the vine*” is to be taken literally, it must be the fruit which the vine bears—that is, *grapes*. We are very sure, however, that it was not *grapes* that were the contents of the paschal cup, and consequently of the cup used in the institution of the Lord’s supper. What then—considering the fruit of the vine as signifying more generally the *produce* of the vine,—*what was it*? One or other of *three things*—*fresh must*,—*the newly expressed juice of the grape*; the *inspissated syrup of grape juice, diluted with water*; or, *fermented wine*. The *first* it could not be; for this reason, that the time of the year when the passover was celebrated, was full five months after the last vintage of the preceding year; so that fresh must, or grape-juice, was out of the question. There are some who, on this subject, seem to forget the seasons altogether, and to have the notion that the fresh juice of the grape might be had at any time. With regard to the *second*, our friends seem to forget another thing. They speak of the juice or blood of the grape *in its natural state*:—but they should recollect that the inspissated syrup of grapes is *not* the juice in its natural state; that it is obtained by an artificial process,—a process much more artificial than that of fermentation; namely, that of slow and repeated boilings; by which it becomes a syrup, but ceases to be the natural unaltered juice of the grape. To the juice of the grape *fermentation* is, strictly and properly, a natural process. So soon, and so unavoidably, does this process begin,—that there appears to be hardly less evidence that grapes, the fruit of the vine, as given by God to man, were *intended to ferment* for him, as that they were intended for him at all. They will ferment in spite of him. And, since it is repre-

sented, when spoken of as God's gift in the same sense with bread, as "making glad the heart of man," and since it is as a fermented beverage that it especially possesses this cheering or exhilarating property, we seem warranted to regard its fermentation as in the divine purpose in the bestowment of the boon. From these considerations, as well as from the whole tenor of the New Testament respecting wine, as in use among the Jews, we feel ourselves justified in concluding that the cup, in the hands of the Saviour when he instituted the commemoration of his dying love, contained nothing else than the *ordinary fermented wines of Judea*.

It arises from the cause before alluded to—a morbid horror (the result of undue attachment to a system) of all that is capable of producing intoxication, how innocent soever in itself,—that any man should ask the question—"How could fermented wine, which so generally and so directly leads men into sin, be an emblem of that blood which was shed for the remission of sin?"—with a variety of questions of a similar description, still more strongly and antithetically put.—"To the pure, all things are pure." There is nothing in fermented wine in itself evil, or in the use of it detrimental:—the very reverse. And why should *not* the two things in nature, which are represented, the one as "*making glad* the heart of man," and the other as "*strengthening* man's heart," be appropriate symbols in an ordinance, of which the design is to commemorate the dying love of Him from whose atoning death we derive both our joy and our strength? It is by the remembrance of him,—by musing on his person and his work,—the freeness of his grace, the riches of his love,—that our hearts are gladdened, and we "go on our way rejoicing;"—that our spiritual strength is renewed, so that, "going from strength to strength," we at length expect to "appear before God in the heavenly Zion!"

It is distressing to think of the lengths to which ultra views on this point are carrying individuals and churches. It is like a *mania*. I had a letter not long since from the pastor of a church in the South, in great perplexity, in consequence of the scruples of some of his members about fer-

mented wine in the supper, and consulting me whether it would be right to allow them, according to their desire, to follow the practice of the priest-ridden laity of the Romish Church, and to *take the sacrament in one kind*,—that is, partaking of the bread only!—Members of churches, I believe, have handed the cup past them; some have withdrawn from communion; and in some, it is said, of the American churches, extraordinary substitutes have been resorted to!

And then, with regard to *church-membership*,—the virtue which, on this subject, the Bible requires of Christians, is “sobriety”—“moderation”—“*temperance*.” There is no command that goes further than this; no injunction of *abstinence*. And, all the commands being to temperance, and the very idea of temperance involving that of use,—all the commands proceed upon the assumption of *use being lawful*. And this, we have seen, accords with the example which we are taught to look up to, as the pattern of sinless excellence. Who, then, is entitled to demand more, as the condition, so far as this one department of duty is concerned, of fellowship in the church of Christ. Or how can the not requiring more ever form a legitimate ground for the withdrawment of any member from a church?—Or how can any church be warrantably constituted on terms of communion that are not to be found in the Bible? It is a very just sentiment of a very sensible and judicious writer on the subject of this morning’s discourse:—“To set up a standard of morality which God has not set up, and to forbid that which God has not forbid, is not the way to ensure the blessing of the Almighty, or the co-operation of his servants; and we shall best promote the interests of the temperance cause, by endeavouring to understand the Scripture argument on the subject, and by confining our requisitions and prohibitions within the limits of Bible morality.”*

* Medhurst.

LECTURE LVIII.

(SECOND DISCOURSE.)

PROV. XX. 1.

“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.”

LAST discourse was entirely occupied with the consideration of the two articles here mentioned—“*wine* and *strong drink*,” and every one who has paid attention to the questions on the subject which of late have been so largely agitated, will be aware how indefinitely it might have been extended. The main drift of that discourse was simply to show,—what it does not require a parade of learned criticism to establish,—that the attempts to make out anything like a uniform and designed distinction between the *words* used, in the Old Testament Scriptures, for wines *that are approved*, and wines that are *disapproved*—the latter as possessing *powers of inebriation*, and the former *not*,—have entirely failed:—that the wines of the Old Testament employed in sacrificial libation, promised as a boon, produced from the earth by the power and goodness of God, and in fully warranted use as a common beverage,—were fermented intoxicating wines:—and that such too was the fact with the wine of the New Testament as *described* by Jesus, *used* by Jesus, miraculously *made* by Jesus, and employed by Jesus in the institution of the ordinance of the supper. It was further my object to show that the duty required in the

followers of Jesus is *temperance*; that in His word, and by His example, more is *not* required; and that they who *do* require more, in evidence of Christian principle, or in order to Christian communion, are chargeable with *going beyond the record*.

II. Our second head was—the *tendencies* ascribed to the articles mentioned:—"Wine is a *mock*er, strong drink is *raging*."

I do not intend to illustrate the two *separately*,—as if one description of tendency belonged to the "*wine*," and another to the "*strong drink*." On the principle of parallelism, and from the frequency with which the two stand associated as conducing to the same results, they may be taken together, and considered as *identified*. The latter may be more *violently* exciting than the former, more fiery and more rapid in its operation; but *each* of the tendencies specified belongs to both. "*Wine*," when taken in excess, "*is raging*" as well as "*strong drink*;" and "*strong drink is a mock*er," as well as "*wine*."

Taking the two clauses, then, together, there are *four things* which may be considered as included in them:—

1. A *beguiling* tendency;—the tendency, I mean, to *entice onward*;—one sip leading to another, and one cup or glass to another; and this, especially in *social* drinking. Whatever opinions I may hold as to the principles of the total abstinence system,—God forbid that I should ever be so unfaithful as to conceal or extenuate the dangers which wait upon the use of whatever possesses inebriating qualities. There is no question on the subject of their seductive tendency,—a tendency which varies in both kind and measure, according to peculiarities of circumstances and of temperament. There *is* danger,—danger of a man's being led on step by step, especially when inexperienced, from little to more, from one stage to another, till, without any previous purpose, nay even in opposition to such purpose, he is brought under the power of the intoxicating cup,—drawn unawares into the snare,—deceived and cheated into insobriety. That this is one description of the *mockery* in our text, I have no

doubt. It *is* mockery. One man would surely be said to *mock* another, when by plausible and subtle arts he drew him into a situation of which he is ashamed himself, and becomes the jest and laughing-stock of others, or—what to many a man is worse—their scorn and pity.

2. Along with a beguiling, there is a *befooling* tendency, According to varieties in the constitutional or acquired temperament of different individuals, it produces, in excess, one or another of two effects. It renders the subject of its power either a *reckless madman*, or a *drivelling idiot*. I might describe the one, and describe the other; but it is unnecessary. Many of you may have witnessed miserable specimens of both. And in either case, surely the “wine,” or the “strong drink, is a *mock*er.” The man under its power ceases to be himself:—he says and does extravagant and mischievous things; or gives utterance, with maudlin look and stuttering and stammering tongue, to the incoherent babblings of folly; or reveals what ought to be secret, and makes himself the easy and unconscious prey of every one who chooses to take advantage of him,—giving away, or allowing to be taken, whatever others like, and coming under obligations of which, in his subsequent sobriety, he may find it no easy matter to shake himself loose. Or, worse still—the understanding gets beclouded and bewildered, and unfitted for the fulfilment of important functions, on which the interests of others as well as his own depend. Thus is often realized the description of the prophet—“They have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment,” Isa. xxviii. 7.

3. There is the tendency to *excite the passions*:—“strong drink is *raging*.”—It is true, that in some cases the subject of inebriation is rendered sillily and ridiculously good-natured. It is the vacant good-nature of the gaping and laughing idiot,—more pitiable, though more harmless, than when the blood is fired and the passions roused. It is, in the latter case, like a temporary phrenzy. Excited himself, and

beyond all power of self-government, the madman says and does things that excite others,—especially when they are in a state approaching to his own. Thus quarrels, all hot and furious, are originated and fomented;—and many a time they terminate in fighting, and wounds, and blood, and even death. What multitudes of the brawls that end thus miserably and sometimes fatally,—and by which culprits are brought to prison, to the bar, to banishment, or to the scaffold, have this for their origin!—And this *inflammatory* tendency is ascribed to *wine* as well as to strong drink:—“Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them!” Isa. v. 11.

4. While there is the excitement of the proud passions, there is produced also the stimulated and heated action of other vicious propensities—those “fleshly lusts which war against the soul.” Intemperance and incontinence are kindred vices; as the words of the wise man teach us—“Thine eyes shall behold strange women.” The one leads on to the other. Fully persuaded as I am of the greatly more extensive prevalence of lewdness than of drunkenness, and believing that for the thousands slain by the latter, the former slays its ten thousands,—yet still, this is quite consistent with the tendency of the latter to excite to the former, and to expose to its temptations. It is, in unnumbered cases, to the influence of intoxicating liquor, that the infamous monster has recourse, to accomplish his purposes of foul seduction.

In these ways, and in others that might be mentioned, “wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging.”—The *tendencies* will come out still more fully, in considering—

III. The *folly of yielding to them*. When is a man “*deceived* thereby?” When he takes of either *at all*? Certainly not. Solomon proceeds on the assumption of *the use*, and of the use being lawful. But a man is deceived, when he *gives way* to the tendencies; when he allows himself to be thrown off his guard, to be seduced into excess, to get his foot entangled in the snare, and to incur the risk of the consequences. He “is not wise,” when he does this *even once*, at any

time, and in any circumstances:—and far more unwise is he, when, by repeated instances of such deception and mockery, he allows a habit to be formed, from which recovery may become difficult and hopeless. And what *are* the consequences, on which the charge of folly rests? They are various, and they are serious. And, as the man is a fool who allows himself to be imposed upon and duped in any way,—the worse the consequences, the greater the folly. I might show you how the acts and habits of intemperance affect the *body*, operating with deleterious and deadly influence on every department of the animal system;—how it works corresponding ravages on the mind, debilitating and debasing its noble powers;—how it destroys character and reputation;—how it thus deprives of confidence, and ruins interest and estate;—what wretchedness, both in the form of poverty, and of discord, and disease, and vice, it introduces into the domestic circle, eating out the very vitals of all enjoyment, and turning the sweetest of heaven's blessings to the “gall of asps;”—and how, above all, as being a sin in itself, and as producing other sins, it tends to the destruction of the soul and the loss of eternity—the forfeiture of its bliss, and the endurance of its never-ending woe. Yes; it is the enemy of the soul; and, if allowed to get the mastery, must be its death. The indulgence of it is utterly incompatible with spiritual life,—destructive of its principles wherever it finds entrance. The contrariety between the two—(not between *wine* and the influence of the Spirit, for *wine* is used as one of the appropriate emblems of the spiritual blessings of the gospel—“Come, buy *wine** and milk without money and without price:”—and the best and strongest of wine—that which is preserved most carefully in its strength, purity, and flavour—“The Lord God will make unto all people a feast of fat things, of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined”)—not, therefore, I repeat, between *wine* and divine influence, but between its *excess* and such influence—“Be not drunk with

* Yayin.

wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.”* —And there can be no doubt, in the mind of any one, who believes the Bible to be God’s word, that intemperance *excludes from heaven*; since no terms can be more explicit and peremptory than those in which this sentence of exclusion is affirmed.† Ah! then, “*not wise*” indeed is the man, who is “deceived” by the ensnaring influence of the “wine” and the “strong drink!” He is a fool, for body and soul, for time and for eternity!

The advocates of *total abstinence* may very naturally think I have been making out a good case for them; and they will marvel that I should not instantly and strongly draw the inference, which to *their* minds seems so clear and immediate that it cannot be resisted. There is one ground, however, on which I can rest contented in being marvelled at by them;—namely, that in marvelling at me, they must marvel at *the Bible and its divine Author*. While they say, —“If such be the tendencies, and such the consequences of yielding to them, it is best to *renounce entirely* articles of which the danger is thus great,”—it is nevertheless matter of fact, about which there can be no dispute, that such is not the inference drawn in the Word of God; that *there*, no such abstinence is, on any such grounds, enjoined. On the contrary, as we have already seen, the “*wine that gladdens the heart of man*” is as much the gift of God for his use, and for the purpose which it is described as answering, as the “*bread which strengtheneth his heart*,” it is numbered amongst promised blessings, and the privation of it among threatened judgments; and our Saviour used it, and countenanced the use of it, and produced it by miracle for the purposes of innocent conviviality. Surely from all this it ought to be admitted, that abstinence is *not incumbent*. The use, so far from being interdicted, has the clearest and strongest of all possible sanctions;—the gift and promise of God, and the example of Jesus Christ. On all it is incum-

* Eph. v. 18.

† See, among many passages, 1 Cor. vi. 9—11; Gal. v. 21.

bent to beware of excess,—of going beyond the bounds of temperate enjoyment. We shall have occasion hereafter to speak more largely of the questions, What is moderation? and What is excess? Meantime I can only offer a single remark on the logic which concludes against all use from the danger of abuse, and which infers the propriety and obligation of *entire abstinence* from the *indefiniteness* of the terms *moderation* and *excess*, and the difficulty (if, indeed, in the present instance, such difficulty there be) of drawing with accurate precision bounding lines between the one and the other. How many of the virtues are there which are, even to a greater degree, in the same predicament with *moderation*? Who will draw the exact line between covetousness and generosity? Who will define the precise limits of profusion and penuriousness? Are we then to attempt no mean between the extremes? Must we give *all* away, that we may not be charged with penuriousness, or keep *all* to ourselves, to avoid the charge of profusion?—Because there is great difficulty in determinately fixing the limits of the precept—“Be not conformed to this world,” are we to adopt the course of doing *nothing that the world does at all*?—There is such a thing as *temperance*, for the word of God commands it:—and there is a possibility of ascertaining, sufficiently for all practical and salutary purposes, the legitimate limits of the virtue; for the word of God does not enjoin impossibilities. We have admitted, however, the dangers; and it is the duty of every individual to be on his guard against them; and the duty of every public teacher and guardian of religion and morals, to *put others* on their guard against them; and to accommodate their warnings to the various peculiarities of temptation. I would, first of all, warn of his danger the man who *sees none*; for in this and some other things, the danger is seldom greater than when there is no sense of it, but a feeling of careless security. I would warn the man, and especially the youth, who is fond of company, to beware of the enticements which arise from that source to the free use of the exhilarating glass, and to the habit of associating the two together, and of the hazard of thus contracting the same

fondness for the one as for the other,—for the glass as for the company. I would warn those who, by any kind of regular custom of taking a certain quantity, however small, (in general a bad practice) feel themselves beginning to contract a liking for it, and a craving sensation that they cannot do without it, to break off the habit ere it obtains a single day's further mastery. I would warn those who are tempted to have recourse to the wine or the spirit cup, for the purpose of banishing or suppressing the morbid horror of low spirits and nervous and hysterical affections, to beware of purchasing a temporary relief at the fearful expense of the formation of a permanent habit, a thousand times worse than the evil it is intended to abate; and which, while it *may* abate for the time, it in the end most miserably augments. I would warn the man who, by his very hatred and scorn of *tee-totalism*, is in danger, for the very sake of showing how heartily he does hate and scorn it, of taking what he should not take, and flying to the contrary extreme.

But both the general and the special warnings may be sounded, while the liberty of use is maintained, and the obligation to entire abstinence denied. There are certain points respecting which we are all agreed, and our agreement about which ought never to be lost sight of. They are such as these. We are all of one mind as to the sinfulness and guilt of intemperance in itself:—we are all of one mind as to the vastness of the variety and amount of crime and misery to which this sin gives prolific and fatal birth;—the many streams of bitterness and pollution that flow from this foul and noxious spring:—we are all of one mind as to the extreme desirableness of having this enormous aggregate of crime and misery diminished, and, as far as within the limits of possibility, removed. For an equally deep conviction and heartfelt sense of these things, we are all entitled to claim equal credit: and he who is disposed to question it in his neighbour, only shows that there is one virtue at least which his system has failed to teach him,—the precious virtue of *charity*.—We contend, that it is possible to hold all such convictions, and cherish all such feel-

ings, in the most perfect sincerity, without coming to the conclusion of its being a duty to have recourse to *total abstinence*. And the ground we take up in maintaining this, is, —that although, in the word of God, the moral turpitude of the sin of intemperance is, in the very strongest terms, affirmed; although its sentence of condemnation is, in all its fearfulness, pronounced, and the denouncing admonitions of Heaven are everywhere pointed against it; although all the varieties of trespass and of woe to which it leads in time, and the “worm that dieth not, and the fire that never shall be quenched” in which its course must close, are fully known, and estimated, in all their extent, by the God who has given us the Bible,—there is not, from the beginning to the end of that Bible, any interdiction of the things themselves from the existence and abuse of which the evils arise,—any injunction whatever to *abstain* from them; but promises of them as benefits, and liberty to use them, provided the abuse of them were avoided.

For my own part, I recur to one of the points alluded to in last discourse. I take my stand on the example of my Master. That example every Christian admits to have been without spot or blemish. “He did no sin.” “He fulfilled all righteousness.” Every step of his life was on the very centre line of virtue, in undeviating harmony with that law which was “within his heart,” and which was “holy, and just, and good.” Yet this pattern of sinless excellence *used wine*. The condemnation of drunkenness,—the description of its effects, —the denunciations of Jehovah against it,—His warnings to flee from it,—and the judgments, in this world and the world to come, thundered forth as its inevitable reward;—these were all in the Old Testament Scriptures:—the very words of our text were there, and the other words quoted from a subsequent chapter. It was amongst the sins of Judah, which were preparing for them those heavy woes which drew from his eyes the tears of pity over their devoted city. Yet He does not set the example of *abstinence*:—He does not feel it incumbent upon him to mark his abhorrence of the abuse, by the entire abandonment of the use;

or to induce others to have recourse to such abandonment as the only effectual means of putting an end to the sin of drunkenness. *His* example was that, not of *abstinence*, but of *temperance*. Now we are certain that the example He set was both positively and negatively perfect,—perfect in what he *did*, and perfect in what he did *not* do; that he neither did what he ought not to have done, nor failed to do what he ought to have done. Are the disciples, then, deserving of blame, for not doing what the Master did not do?—Here, I repeat, I take my stand; and I feel my footing firm. I do not plead for exemption from an act of self-denial. I should be ashamed to call it such, did either the command or the example of my Master lay it upon me;—and I feel that we are uncharitably maligned when our principles and practice are imputed to an unwillingness to relinquish a sensual indulgence. But I plead for the sinlessness of my Saviour's example; for the sacredness from all impeachment, direct or implied, of my Saviour's character; for liberty to act, without subjecting myself to any charge of failure in duty, as my Saviour acted. I tremble, when I hear a charge heedlessly brought against the disciple, that rests on a principle such as must necessarily carry it back to the disciple's Lord.

To any man who would lay *sin* to my charge for drinking *wine*, I say at once, "I am not careful to answer thee in this matter"—He who "did no sin" drank wine;—and, diffident as I might be of rectitude in myself, in this or in any thing else, had I not his example before me, I feel contented and at ease under an imputation in which I stand associated with the "*wine-bibber*" of Nazareth! When one hears the charge, that the *temperate*—they who use intoxicating liquors in moderation—are the *causes* of all the drunkenness in the country, the feeling that takes possession of the mind is one of mingled amazement and grief—amazement at the absurdity, grief at the uncharitableness of such a charge. True enough it is, that, were there no drinking at all, there would be no intemperance, just as, were there no *eating* at all, there would be neither epicurism nor gluttony,—and

were there no *credit* at all, there would be no “accommodation bills,” and none of the reckless and ruinous speculations which are encouraged and maintained by means of them,—and, as in many other analogous cases, were the thing itself not existing, the evils arising from its abuse would be at an end:—but that those who take the use of God’s gifts which He has himself permitted, that *they* should be loaded with all the guilt and misery arising from the abuse of them by others,—that they who do what God allows should be charged with causing, by their example, the crimes and guilt and punishment of those who do what God forbids!—has something in it so utterly unreasonable, that the simple statement of it should be its refutation in every soundly and soberly thinking mind: but I am relieved at once from the necessity of all such reasonings, by the same example. The charge *cannot* be just; because, if it were, the example of the “holy, harmless, and undefiled”—“the man Christ Jesus”—would come in for its share of the blame, as a part of the cause of all the intemperance in the land of Judea! If such admonitions and commands are quoted to me as—“Touch not the unclean thing;” “Be not conformed to this world;” “Be filled with the Spirit;” “Be not partakers of other men’s sins;” “Do all to the glory of God;” “Let not your good be evil spoken of;” “Abstain from all appearance of evil;” “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God;” and others of a similar character, (and there are those who *do* quote them, as if they really thought they had application,) I meet them all with the same answer—Did Jesus “touch the unclean thing?” Was Jesus “conformed to this world?” Did Jesus “grieve that Holy Spirit which was not given by measure unto him?” Was Jesus, whom “the world hated because he testified of it that its works were evil,” “a partaker in other men’s sins?” Did Jesus do anything otherwise than “to the glory of God?” Was it not His “*good*” that was “evil spoken of,” when He was called “a wine-bibber?” Was there anything in Him that could justly be charged with even the “appearance of evil?” If all these questions must be answered in one way—then what becomes of the application of

the texts to those who only imitate His example? It proceeds altogether on a principle, which that example, as well as the reason of the thing, has stamped with falsehood, that the *use* by one is rendered sinful by the *abuse* on the part of others. But assuredly, no fellow-Christian is entitled to require in another the relinquishment of what he has the sanction of his Master's example for doing. We are surely safe when we are doing as Christ did. And with deliberate seriousness I say it—They who separate from their brethren because they cannot feel it their duty to adopt *abstinence* principles, and who, consequently, require such abstinence as a term of communion, proceed upon a principle, which, if consistently followed out, would lead them to pronounce a sentence of excommunication, from His own church, of that church's Saviour and Lord! And what else do *they* than require abstinence as a term of fellowship, who placard "the British churches" as "*bulwarks of intemperance?*"* Did they mean by this, that in so far as such churches fail in their discipline by retaining in their communion the drunkard and the tippler, they were the "bulwarks of intemperance,"—it would be a truth. But this is not the ground of their quarrel with the churches, nor of their separation from them. And in so far as they mean that the churches are "the bulwarks of intemperance," by retaining in their fellowship those who use God's gifts in moderation, and by not collectively adopting and acting upon the principles of *total abstinence*,—I am borne out by the example and by all the precepts of the Saviour in pronouncing the imputation *wholesale slander*.

By this remark I am naturally led to another—namely, that the collective as well as individual example of God's people ought to be one of the influential means of discountenancing and putting down this and all other vices in the world. "It *is* a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation," that by the amalgamation to such an extent of the church with the

* This refers to a large placard put up at the time throughout all the streets of Glasgow, in which the language quoted was used,

world, and the admission and retention of so many, in the former, of persons chargeable with the abuse of God's gifts in intemperance and other sins, the power of this example has been so sadly weakened, and even turned in the opposite direction. Were the church purified of its corruption,—were “the wicked shaken out of it,”—were the line of demarcation more boldly defined, by the church's “coming out and being separate,”—were the world thus deprived of every ground for pointing with the finger of scorn at tipling saints and godly drunkards, and saying “What do ye more than others?”—were there, in the personal and collective character of the people of God, a constant, faithful, consistent testimony, like that of their Lord, borne to the world “that the deeds thereof are evil;”—this would be, so far as example goes, what the Lord requires of his people; and it would just be—conformity to his own. And I am strongly inclined to think—and demand credit from my total abstinence brethren for my sincerity in saying so, how much soever they may question the soundness of the sentiment,—that *Christian example* ought to be an example of the *influence of Christian principle*. The apostle says—“The grace of God which bringeth salvation teacheth us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world,” Tit. ii. 11, 12. I mean, then, that the more distinctly manifest it is to the world that the *sobriety* of Christians is the result of their having received the grace of God,—of their faith of the doctrine of “grace reigning through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord,”—the result of pure principle, independently of all superadded and extraneous considerations, the greater is the glory to the truth and to its divine Author,—the more distinct and vivid is the “holding forth of the word of life”—the more unequivocal the impression made of “singleness of eye,” or of the efficiency of the one simple-hearted principle of regard to the Lord's will, under the influence of the Lord's truth. Now, when Christians,—instead of, in their distinct capacity, as individuals and as churches, bearing to the world their practical testimony of

the power of the gospel—of the gospel exclusively—in restraining from evil and rendering them, as God's "peculiar people," "zealous of good works,"—enter into combinations with men of the world, and unite with them in distinct social *pledges* of abstinence from particular evils,—is not the influence of their own peculiar principles by this means obscured?—is not its unequivocal character impaired?—does not it become to the world a matter of some uncertainty, what proportion of the restraining influence belongs to the *gospel*, and what proportion to the *pledge*?

Is this altogether desirable? Should not the great end of Christian example be, to recommend, not merely the external imitation, or the joint practice, of a particular virtue, or the stipulated avoidance of a particular sin,—but those divine and saving truths from which the distinguishing character of the true believer arises? And is there no sacrifice made, of real benefit to men's souls, when this is in any measure compromised, and the truths that unite and purify the Church kept out of distinct and prominent view by the principles and engagements that are the bond of the abstinence association?

In this same connexion, I am further led to ask, whether to Christians it should not be an object of especially solicitous desire and endeavour, that the means used for the *reformation* of the "world lying in the wicked one," should be such as, at the same time, to effect their *salvation*?—that the reformation attempted should, as far as possible, be based on such principles?—that the grand aim should be, to bring the minds and hearts of men under the influence of these principles, that so "out of the good treasure of the heart they may bring forth that which is good?" Should not the great power of reformation which Christians apply be the power of divine truth? When *this* power is effectually applied, *all* ends are gained. By other means, the end of *external reformation* may be gained. And is there not a danger of this being counted enough? When the reformation is effected by means of truth and principle—I mean *Christian* truth and Christian principle,—*two* important

results are attained. In the first place, *self-deception* is prevented. Christians are well aware that sobriety is not conversion. When we succeed in inducing a man to relinquish the outward practice of intemperance, or of any other evil, we have, without question, in one, or, it may be, in more than one sense, done him good: but we may have done him good in a way that leaves him still "*without God*;" and if the man is tempted to trust in his reformation, as all in all—which we believe multitudes do,—while we save him from one delusion, we leave him in another. We have saved him from being a jovial drunkard or a despicable tippler,—and have made him a sober, self-satisfied, but unconverted sinner, still "far from God and far from righteousness," and "before whom the publicans and the harlots may enter into the kingdom of God."—I grant, at the same time, and delight in granting, that by the outward reformation access may be more readily obtained to his mind, for bringing before it the saving truths of the gospel. All I would say is, that every *Christian* institution will keep conversion and salvation in view, as well as reformation of manners and habits of life,—and will on no account stop short of bringing sinners to God—"saving souls from death and hiding the multitude of sins"—as its ultimate aim;—and, as far as possible, precluding and suppressing all false and delusive confidences, lest outward reform prove only "a lie in their right hand," with which they "go down to the grave."

Secondly, *permanence* is ensured. This too is a consideration of much importance. When we succeed in effecting a change of *principle*, we have a hold of a man, such as nothing merely external or conventional can ever give us. When there is nothing beyond a verbal pledge or a paper bond between man and man,—or even an engagement in God's name, that is not associated with the believing adoption of any enlightened principles, the security we have for permanence is very precarious indeed. I speak of course comparatively. There may be a kind of principle in the conviction of the moral turpitude and injurious effects of

drunkenness; but, in very many instances, these will prove little more tenacious in holding the conscience and restraining the conduct, than did the ropes and the withs before the strength of the unshorn Samson. Nothing short of a genuine change of heart can give assurance of a steadfast and permanent change of character.

We conceive that considerations such as these ought to save us at least from the dogmatical and indiscriminating censure and condemnation of our abstinence friends, if we more than hesitate in associating with them in their plans. There is but one rational ground of which I am aware, on which Christians ought ever to think of basing any such plans. The principle to which I allude is that laid down by the Apostle in Rom. xiv. 21,—the principle of SELF-DENIAL FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS. I grant at once, that while there is liberty given in the Bible to drink wine, there is equal liberty to abstain from drinking it. There is no obligation to use it;—unless it be in cases where the constitution may require it as part of the means of maintaining the vigour and spirit necessary for the efficient discharge of incumbent duties;—in which case the use itself becomes an incumbent duty. Still, as a general truth, there is no obligation to take, any more than to abstain; and there being no such obligation, Christians may, without question, abstain, when they conceive such abstinence likely to be the means of effecting any special good. If our friends would keep to *this* ground, and follow their own convictions in acting upon it; and have becoming charity for those who have not the same convictions, and who, for such reasons as have been assigned, do not feel themselves either bound, or even at liberty, to co-operate with them—*all would be well*. Who hinders them? who would interfere with them? Let them only beware of either imputing bad motives, or at least the absence of good motives, to those who differ from them. For my own part, with regard to the principle laid down by the Apostle, I am not at all satisfied that the case in which the statement of it originated is, by any means, correctly parallel to the one to

which it is applied; and I do not know any one point of greater delicacy and difficulty than to settle the extent to which the application of it ought to be carried;—how far we are called upon to relinquish what God has granted us, that others may abstain from what He has interdicted; and to do what God has not commanded, in order to induce others to abstain from what He has forbidden. The one case relates to the people of God; the other to the world:—but granting that the spirit of the principle might be extended alike to both, there is another difference. In the one case, there are opposite convictions of conscience. It is a case where the scruples of the weak rested on divine authority in their minds, although under a mistaken apprehension of the divine mind in the matter to which it related:—and when I see the apostle dealing tenderly with this scruple, fearing to “wound the weak conscience,” I see in his behaviour and his counsels conformity to the example of Him who “did not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax;” who bore condescendingly and kindly with the ignorance and weakness of his followers, teaching them “as they were able to bear,” not “putting the new wine into old bottles,” or making “the children of the bridechamber fast while the bridegroom was with them.” In the other case, there is nothing of the kind;—there is no difficulty about the sin or the duty, even to the weakest,—nor any room for conscientious scruple; nothing being plainer in the Bible than that all excess and intemperance are forbidden, while the moderate use has the permission and sanction of divine authority. In this case, therefore, opposite convictions of conscience there can be none. And when I look at the same Master; when, with the full assurance that the example He set was, in every point, what it ought to have been, and in no respect either defective or redundant, I find that example, on the point in question, one, not of abstinence, but of temperance—am I not bound to regard His practical testimony against the world’s evil works to have been sufficient,—and to conclude that what was sufficient in Him must be sufficient in his followers? Notwithstanding all this, however, I would

not be disposed to contend with the advocates of total abstinence against the use they make of the example on which they rest so much—the example of the Apostle; and would grant them, as far as they think it may legitimately be carried, the fairness of their principle. But they must pardon me for more than hesitating about their manner of applying it. While, when I hear of good accruing from their exertions; of drunkards reformed, and drunkenness prevented, and habits of sobriety spreading, I hesitate to utter a word that might sound like indifference to the well-being of my fellow-men, and still more to put forth a hand to arrest or impede its progress;—yet I have many apprehensions, uncertainties and misgivings about the ultimate results. I feel myself on safe ground when I am imitating the example of my Lord; and I cannot even appear, in any way, to give countenance to the *extravagant* and *erroneous* principles of Bible interpretation by which the abstinence system seems to me to be upheld,—or the *false* principles of action and character which are adopted in so many of its publications, and the *uncharitable* principles on which it judges the conduct of others.

But time commands me to have done. I conclude by simply reminding my hearers of two great Bible truths—both alike essential to be kept in mind—that “*by grace we are saved*”—the sole ground of a sinner’s acceptance before God being the “blood and righteousness” of the Redeemer, in which the medium of interest is “the belief of the truth:”—and that “*without holiness no man shall see the Lord*;”—the faith of the truth, in every instance, “purifying the heart and working by love;”—the very “grace that bringeth salvation teaching all its subjects, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.”

LECTURE LIX.

(THIRD DISCOURSE.)

PROV. XXIII. 29—35.

“Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.”

It was my purpose to have reserved any enlarged illustration of the evils of *intemperance*, till I should arrive at this passage in the ordinary course of exposition. I have thought it preferable, however, to follow up my two former discourses with an immediate exposition of its contents. A more graphic and vivid description,—a more powerful and awakening appeal,—a more solemn, earnest, and alarming expostulation and warning, it is hardly possible to conceive.

Before entering on the illustration of it, I cannot avoid requesting attention to the clear and ample confirmation it affords of all that was formerly said about the intoxicating character of the wines of Palestine. I stated before, and repeat it, that no learning is necessary to make out the only point which it is of any consequence to establish. It is easy to speak of the weak and light wines of that country. But

how can any one read such a passage as this—and it is very far from standing alone—without being satisfied, that, whatever varieties there might be in the wines in ordinary use,—just as, with ourselves, there are weaker and stronger, lighter and more heady wines, there were some of them, that were not only intoxicating, but intoxicating to the utmost conceivable degree. For assuredly, nothing can go beyond the stage of drunkenness depicted in the verses which I have just read. Why, then, all the learned discussion? Why the raising of subscriptions for the purpose of sending commissions to Palestine, “to examine into the history of ancient wines, their manufacture and use?” Can this be necessary, to ascertain, to any reader of the Bible, whether they were intoxicating, when he reads of “the drunkards of Ephraim,” and finds so frequently meeting him, warnings against the sin of intoxication, and against not “*strong drink*” alone, but “*wine*,” as its fatal cause. To any one, therefore, who says he cannot believe that the wines of Judea were at all of the same heady qualities with ours,—I should think it enough to say *Read these verses*. No matter whether they were the same, in their manufacture, and in their qualities generally, with ours or not,—*one* quality they evidently possessed,—*the* quality which is the only ground of controversy:—they were *intoxicating*.

It will be impossible to avoid, in the illustration of this passage, repeating sentiments of a similar description to some of those advanced in last lecture. For this,—so far as it may be the case,—allowance will readily be made.

Our subject, then, is the SIN OF INTEMPERANCE. *Here*, there is no great likelihood of difference of opinion. Should there be difference, it will be on the part of such as are themselves, in a greater or less degree, addicted to the vice, and fond to discover grounds of palliation and self-defence,—or who are just in the perilous predicament of contracting a fondness for it.

Intemperance is the use of any intoxicating liquor *to excess*. It matters not what the liquor be—whether wine or malt-liquor, or ardent spirits, or extract of opium, or anything

else. The evil lies, not in the article used, but in the *excessive use of it*. Now I fancy I hear some one say—and smile with a kind of self-complacency in saying it, as if he had found a puzzle for the speaker and a convenient refuge for himself—Ah! but what *is* the *excessive use* of it?—Allow me to say to such persons, that I never hear this question put, without trembling for him who puts it. I state it as my pastoral experience, that among all the cases of discipline for the sin of intemperance that have come under the cognizance of the church, I have hardly known one in which the party concerned, when evidence was clear against him, has not been disposed to take refuge in such excuses as—“I grant that I have at times taken pretty freely—perhaps I may at a time have gone a little further than I should have gone; but *I always knew what I was doing*.”

Now, first of all, this is far from being always true. A man frequently says and does things, when under the influence of liquor, of the strangeness of which he is not at the time sensible; and does even right things *in a manner* that plainly betrays his condition to others, when he is entirely, or in a great measure, unconscious of it himself. But this is not all. Even supposing what these persons say of themselves were true, what a ground is this for a professing Christian,—nay, what a ground for any man holding even the common principles of morality,—to take! What! is it consistent with Christian principle—with Christian prudence—with Christian self-knowledge—with Christian vigilance—to venture thus to the very confines of evil,—to sport upon the borders of sin—to tread, with heedless step, the verge of hell? I can have no hesitation in saying, that the man who goes thus far *has exceeded*. He may not have got drunk; but he has tampered with temptation;—he has violated all the admonitions to self-jealousy; he has shown a conscience not impressed as it ought to be with “abhorrence of that which is evil,” by the very fact of his venturing so near it; he has shown an inclination, that would go further, if he dared,—that has not boldness enough as yet to sin freely;—if he is not a drunkard in *fact*, he is one in *will*,—

and he is in most imminent danger of very soon being one in fact too.

There are some to be found who, constitutionally or by custom, can take more than their neighbours, without being, as they say, the worse for it. And such persons have been many a time known to boast of *how much they can stand*. But not only is this grovelling and disgusting,—it is deeply criminal. It is a waste of God's bounties,—a perversion of them to purposes they were never meant to serve; it is a species of indulgence at once deleterious to the body, and hardening and brutalizing to the mind; the boasting is a lure to others to try their strength,—a lure which, when successful, brings to the account of him who presents it all the sin and guilt produced by the imitation. There cannot be greater curses to society than those who are thus “mighty to mingle strong drink;” and whose boast is, how many they can, as the phrase is, “lay under the table,” while they themselves keep sober! The Bible says—“Woe unto them!” and all who wish well to mankind will say *Amen!* to the woe.

There are some, too, who, though they never perhaps get themselves thoroughly drunk—are for ever at it—tasting—tasting—tasting—whenever they can find the opportunity. One does not like to make comparisons; because such is the deceitfulness of the heart, and such men's proneness to palliate their own forms and modes of evil, that when you represent another form as *worse* than theirs, they are tempted to a latitude of inference, such as makes them feel at ease in their own indulgence, as if it were hardly an evil at all,—as if the sin were extracted from it by comparison with the greater sin of the other:—yet, in some respects at least, the incessant tippler is a worse and more hopeless character, than the occasional drunkard. The habit gets stronger—the craving more imperious—and the danger greater of the character of a confirmed *sot* being the result. Even although the *tippler* should never fall into absolute intoxication, he is *intemperate*. He may not go to great excess in any one particular case; but his incessant use is excess. He may be

more intemperate in this respect, than the man whose fits of intoxication—or whose *rambles* (to use a cant word, which will convey to many my meaning better than any other,) are the exceptions, more or less frequent, to their ordinary sobriety. But away with such comparisons. All the modes of the evil are bad,—all to be shunned,—all to be abandoned. Men addicted to the vice, in one or other of its modes, have drawn variously the line of demarcation between temperance and *intemperance*, according to their different tastes and propensities,—have drawn it sometimes seriously, and more frequently *in jest*—“fools making a mock at sin.” I will not descend from the dignity of the place I occupy by meddling with any of these. They are not the results of sober-minded conviction; and to refute the jokes, either of the low tippler or of the jovial debauchee, would be as degrading as it is unnecessary.

In the passage before us Solomon speaks of those that “*tarry long at the wine, that go to seek mixed wine.*” They “tarry at the wine” from fondness of it, and reluctance to quit it—yet another, and another, and another cup:—and they “go to seek mixed wine”—that is, either they inquire with eagerness where the best, the most deliciously flavoured, the strongest, the most highly seasoned and thoroughly inspissated wines, are to be found,—that there they may hold their carousals; or, they seek still a stronger and a stronger stimulant;—having recourse, when simple unmixed wines have failed of their effect, to those more heady and intoxicating combinations of liquor, or those liquors that have been mingled with drugs and spices of highly stimulating virtue, by which the efficacy may be enhanced as well as the relish improved. But the terms are evidently applicable to the indulgence, in whatever way, and by whatever means, in the propensity to excess. They describe drinking to intoxication, whatever be the beverage, and whether in solitude or in company. The terms too, it may be remarked, are expressive of *habit*. They suppose the habit formed. But everything that tends to the formation of the habit, must of course be considered as included. The habit is the height and consummation of

the evil ; but all the successive acts by which the habit has been formed come in for their proportional shares of the guilt. *Habitual* intoxication is the worst state of the vice ; but *occasional* intoxication is still the vice. It is out of the occasional that the habitual arises. Men may think lightly, and talk lightly, of going beyond due bounds at a time, so long as they keep from the *habit*. But they would do well to remember, that every individual instance of excess is an act of decided and flagrant sin ; and that, while it is vicious in itself, it is additionally vicious, as conducing to the formation of the habit. The man who makes light of occasional intoxication, is in the high way to the character of a habitual drunkard. There is, on this subject (and the observation applies to swearing and other sins, as well as to intemperance,) a strange perversion of principle at times to be found, in the estimates which men form of evil, or perhaps rather in the manner in which they talk about it. I refer to the manner in which we frequently hear men allege the strength of habit in palliation of their misdeeds. The swearer has got so habituated to the use of oaths, that he utters them, without being sensible of doing it. The drunkard has become so addicted to the use of stimulating and intoxicating liquors that he cannot do without them ; he absolutely requires them ; the craving has become such that it *must* be gratified. *So they speak* ; and in speaking so, they are guilty of the extraordinary delusion of making the very worst form and most flagrant degree of a sin the apology for the commission of it ; —the habit of profaneness the excuse for being profane ! —the habit of intemperance the apology for its individual acts ! forgetting that the habit itself involves in it the accumulated guilt of all the individual acts which have either contributed to its formation, or have arisen from it when formed !

The sin, then, of which I now speak is *intemperance*, as including the immoderate use of intoxicating liquors, even although absolute intoxication should rarely if ever be the result ; and especially intoxication itself, in all its degrees, and all its stages, —from the first unsettlement of sober reason, down to the lowest pitch of drunken insensibility.

Our next inquiry must be—what are the *effects* of this sin? and our reply to this question will bring out more clearly the nature and the amount of its criminality. We shall take up the effects, as they are here, directly and indirectly, enumerated; there being few of the evils resulting from this prolific parent sin, which may not find a place, naturally enough, within the limits of this most graphic and vivid portraiture.

We begin with observing, that, on the very first and most superficial view of the case, there is apparent in it a very flagrant evil. God has given man *reason*, for the superintendence and direction of his conduct in all the situations and connexions of life in which His providence may be pleased to place him. How, then, is that man to answer to his Maker and Judge, who wilfully deprives himself of the presidency of reason over his mind, and heart, and conscience, and behaviour?—who, of his own accord, *irrationalizes* himself—reduces himself to a brute? When I use this comparison, I refer exclusively to the unseating of reason from the throne of its legitimate and divinely appointed rule, or the impairing, in whatever degree, of its capacity for duly maintaining it. There is a sense in which the man who acts this part sinks himself far lower than the brute. Yes:—it is a slander on the inferior tribes of the animal creation, to compare a drunken man to a brute. The brute follows the prevailing instincts of its constitution,—and acts according to the measure of understanding which the all-wise Creator has conferred upon it. But the drunkard voluntarily bereaves himself of understanding; voluntarily incapacitates himself for his required functions; voluntarily becomes a half-witted fool, a violent maniac, or a drivelling idiot.

The first question in the passage cited is—“Who hath *woe*? who hath *sorrow*?” Many, alas! are the sources of “sorrow” and “woe” to the drunkard, especially so long as his conscience, and his relative affections, and his regard to reputation and self-interest, retain any portion of sensibility, and have not been reduced to absolute callousness by pro-

tracted indulgence in sin. First of all, there is the woe of *conscious debasement and guilt*. Impelled by the unnatural cravings of a disordered appetite, or by the love of company and of social mirth, all is, for the time, joviality and glee:—who on earth so happy as the drunkard, when under the immediate impulse of his exhilarating stimulus? But, to form a true judgment, you must look at him when the excitement is past, and he is left to sober recollection—to the awful *collapse* of his over-stimulated spirits. Then come—(I am supposing the case of one not yet *seared* in conscience)—then come his fits of penitence. He is stung with remorse. He is ashamed, and dissatisfied with himself, painfully, fretfully, indignantly dissatisfied. He thinks, it may be, of the good principles of piety and virtue in which he was educated; of the parental example by which these were recommended and enforced; and of the anguish and heart-break which his conduct must occasion to fond parents. Or again, if he has a family,—if he is himself a husband or a father,—his heart is wrung with the agony of self-reproach, in looking on his wife and children, whom he has been depriving of his company, denying the endearments of domestic life, dishonouring, distressing, abridging of their comforts, impoverishing, famishing, and possibly, while in his cups and rallied by his jovial associates, he has spoken of with unkindness and contumely, and, when he has come home, has treated with the words and the acts of abuse and violence;—or in gazing on the bitterly reproaching look of his heart-broken partner, whom he has wantonly and cruelly alienated by his unnatural neglect and profligacy,—or on what (if any spark of nature's sensibility still lingers in his bosom) is still more full of anguish—the affectionate smile, through glistening tears, that would fain and fondly win him back to the joys of home, and to the ways of sobriety and virtue and happiness!—Then, again, there is the “woe” and “sorrow,” when he thinks how he has forfeited his reputation—that “good name which is better than precious ointment;” how he has injured his credit, and shaken the confidence that was reposed in him; how he has neglected and

left undone something of essential moment, or has said, or done, or consented to, something eminently detrimental to himself, to his business, to his family:—he is angry with himself; he sees the damage, and he sees it to be irretrievable; he chafes and frets in vain; and by this very feeling of restless irritation, he is perhaps driven to seek refuge from his self-inflicted wretchedness in new and still greater excesses!—These are but specimens of the woes and sorrows, of which the variety is without end, that spring from this fountain of bitterness.

It follows—“Who hath *contentions*?” I need not surely say, how frequently these are the accompaniments and consequences of intemperance:—how teasingly and provokingly troublesome on the one hand, and how senselessly quarrelsome on the other, it often renders its poor unhappy victims. They become reckless of all reason and of all risks. They *will* fight; they *must* fight. They contend for contention’s sake. To tell them there is no cause, is to speak to madmen. Broils and angry debates are fomented, over which reason has left passion to preside alone,—whence come blows and battles, such as not seldom terminate seriously and even fatally. How many feuds and animosities, that separate friends and families, and spread discord and strife through neighbourhoods, and sometimes end in blood, have had their rise over the bottle, when men continue at it till wine or strong drink inflame them!—How many of the murders that from time to time take place, and of which the scaffold is the just requital, may be traced to intemperance!—how large a proportion of the “blood that crieth unto God from the ground” may be justly laid to the charge of that sin!

“Who hath *babbling*?”—All who have marked the effects of intoxication must have observed how different they are on different mental temperaments. Some who are naturally quiet, good-humoured, and gentle, it renders loquacious, irritable, and headstrong; while others, naturally perhaps far from being the most easily managed, are converted into personifications of good humour. Like a temporary insanity,

(which in truth it is) it works various and strange transformations of character. But, while the frantic fury of the drunkard is frightful, the silly incoherent drivel, and the broken, drawling, inarticulate, babbling speech, of the drunkard, is, to the last degree, pitiable and disgusting. Surely could the poor man see and hear himself—*that* would work a reformation, if anything would! How often may the drunkard, in his cups, be heard maintaining, with pertinacious and unmoved obstinacy, the most foolish and impertinent absurdities;—reiterating the affirmation of them with a stoutness and a violence growing with contradiction;—giving utterance to the most wretched inanities, without meaning and without coherence;—stammering out vows of eternal attachment to persons whom he has hardly seen before, or for whom he cares not a rush when sober:—and all this too, with looks, and tones, and gestures, of the most infantile imbecility! Drunkenness destroys all distinctions and varieties of mental capacity and energy. When reason is once dethroned, wisdom and folly are on a level; and the wisest and most intelligent man in the company sinks into the pre-eminence of the veriest fool,—all froth, and emptiness, and absurdity!

“Who hath *wounds without cause*?” These may be the result of various causes:—sometimes of contentions, when he picks quarrels and gets into brawls with all he meets,—interrupting them, laying hold of them, teasing and insulting them, and receiving in return what from many might be expected:—sometimes of his stumbles and falls, by which he is covered with cuts and bruises:—sometimes even of self-mutilation and violence,—the temporary madness having, in some instances, been known to produce the infliction of severe contusions, and the cleaving off of fingers,—by which they have been confounded afterwards on being told that it was their own doing! These are “wounds *without cause*”—not merely wounds needlessly incurred, and which by sobriety might have been shunned,—but of which the drunkard himself *cannot tell the cause*, but, when he gets sober, marvels whence they have come!

“Who hath *redness of eyes?*”—The habits of the man come to be marked by their effects upon his looks. The inflamed and turgid eye, and the blotched, and fiery, and disfigured countenance, indicate, that the deleterious poison has gone through his frame, and has incorporated with, and tainted, and set on fire the entire mass of circulating blood. His very looks become the index of his character, and give warning to all who look at him to have nothing to do with him.

To these melancholy evils, others still *more* melancholy are added:—“Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.” The two vices, of drunkenness and lewdness, are almost inseparable associates. The one proverbially inflames the other. Intoxication is many a time the first step in seduction to other evils. When unprincipled men are desirous of obtaining the instrumentality of others for any wicked purpose, how often have they been known first to disorder their understandings by tempting them to free indulgence at the bottle! Thousands of crimes have their origin here. The fable is no doubt familiar to many of you—but though a fable it involves an important truth, and an important warning,—of the man to whom the devil is said to have offered the alternative of a choice between *three sins*, one or other of which, as the means of averting some evil or obtaining some good, he was bound to commit. The three sins were, *murder, incest, and drunkenness*. The man made choice of the last, as, in his estimation, incomparably the least. This was the devil’s device; for, when he was under the influence of it, he was easily beguiled into both the other two!—It is needless to say, how insensible the drunkard becomes, when in his cups, to all the feelings and laws of delicacy and decorum,—committing unblushingly the most shameless indecencies, and glorying in his shame; and how readily in such a state, he becomes the prey—the wretched and dishonourable prey—of every vile seducer.

“*And thy lips shall utter perverse things.*”—It was “*babbings*” before. But mere drivelling and folly is not all; it

would be comparatively well if it were. But too often intoxication is the inlet to licentious and impure conversation; to profligate and obscene songs; to slander and abuse even of the best and most venerated characters; to the treacherous and injurious betraying of secrets (which it is sometimes, indeed, the means employed for detecting); to impious and heaven-daring profanities and blasphemies, oaths and curses, and reckless jestings at sacred things. These form the frightful compound, amidst growing confusion, and riot, and violence, of the drunken revel. When a man is in his cups, "*perverse things*" may find utterance, such as will cost him many an hour and many a day of bitter suffering; such as he would cheerfully give all that he is worth to be able to recall; but such as he regrets to no purpose, the utterance and the consequences being alike irretrievable.

The 34th and 35th verses describe the lowest point in the descending scale of the detestable and loathsome vice—the state of *drunken stupor and insensibility*. The man reduced to this condition, when he begins to awake from it, wonders where he has been, and wonders no less to find himself where he is; and he shudders with horror to think of the imminent perils by which, when he knew it not, he has been surrounded. How strange must be the feelings of him who, while sunk in a profound sleep, has been launched alone on the deep, and on waking finds himself there, in this dangerous solitude; or who, while his senses have, in like manner, been locked up, has been laid, insensible, on the mast-head, and opens his eyes to his unwonted and unaccountable position?—Thus it is with the drunkard. When he is informed, on his reason returning to him,—after he has slept away the fumes of his miserable debauch,—where he has been, and what he has said and done,—he startles in astonishment, incredulity, and self-reproach; but he recollects nothing of it. What a graphic delineation we have, in the last verse, of a drunkard beginning to recover!—When he has passed through the different stages, of violent excitation, and of subsequent unconscious impotence;—the vacant stare, —the stammering speech,—the double vision,—the falling

jaw,—the reeling step ;—when he has fallen, and, on attempting to rise, has fallen irrecoverably again ;—has been carried senseless to bed, and has fallen into a profound and beastly sleep :—*here he is before you*—beginning to awake ;—feeling his contusions and wounds, and wondering where and how he can have got them ; stiff and sore ; trying to raise or to stretch himself ; scarcely believing that he is not still asleep ; yawning and listless, in that state of intolerable languor which is said to succeed the fits of high and fevered excitement ! A most wretched state of remorse, and regret, and bitter reflection, and anticipated and dreaded evils ; and yet—accompanied with the unendurable craving and longing for the necessary stimulus,—a craving, which is, alas ! so seldom effectually resisted and subdued—“*I will seek it yet again.*”

The language of the thirty-second verse—“*At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder,*” may be applied to all the subsequent effects together of this sin ;—all the misery of an awakened conscience,—of keen self-reproach,—of corporeal and mental suffering,—of domestic discomfort,—of the loss of reputation, credit, health, life, soul,—*all* may be comprehended in this emphatic similitude.—O my friends, let us not forget, especially, the *last* of this sad series of particulars ! The drunkard destroys HIS SOUL. The temporal evils that result from the course he pursues are many and deeply deplorable. But O ! what is any, what are all of them, compared with *this* !—compared with the spiritual desolation which this sin spreads around it, and the irretrievable ruin of everlasting interests, in which it terminates ! Think of the deathbed of the drunkard,—a deathbed to which, it may be, his criminal and infatuated indulgence has contributed prematurely to bring him ! He has lived “without God,” and he dies “without hope.” He quits the world in the horrors of despair, or in the hardly less fearful insensibility of a seared conscience, an exhausted mind, and a heart drugged into apathy by “strong delusion.” He leaves behind him a ruined character, a ruined fortune, and, it may be, (no thanks to him if it is otherwise,) a ruined family ;—and his ruined self plunges into hell !

I use this strong language freely and boldly, because I have formerly shown you how decidedly I am borne out in the use of it, by the positive assurances and awful denunciations of God's word. I have shown you, that by the express and irrevocable sentence of the Judge of all, *intemperance* is one of the sins which indicate a heart unrenewed by divine grace, and which finally exclude from "the kingdom of heaven." O that I could *impress* the fearful truth, with practically dissuasive power, on the consciences and hearts of all! The renunciation of the vice, where it has been practised, is one of the essential evidences of conversion to God:—"Such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God," 1 Cor. vi. 11. It follows that no one belongs to the number of the "washed and sanctified and justified," who belongs to the class of *drunkards*. And from this it further follows, that none such should ever be admitted to the fellowship of the church below, seeing they stand excluded from the church above; but must be *kept* out and *cast* out O! well might Solomon say, with all the emphasis of pointed and affectionate warning—"Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright." The look forbidden is the look that springs from and provokes *desire*. There is always danger in looking at a tempting object. It was when Eve looked on the tempting fruit that she fell. The man who looks on the wine with special pleasure, when it sparkles and mantles in the brimming cup, excites his longing after it, and is in imminent danger of being overcome. If he would conquer, and avoid being conquered, he would do well to turn his eyes away; for it is, in this and in other cases, by the eye that the temptation enters and prevails.

The people of God themselves are expressly warned against the indulgence and the encroachments of this miserable vice: "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit," Eph. v. 18. On this remarkable passage I may be allowed to observe—that being "filled with the Spirit" is the best preventive, the most effectual safeguard, against this

and all other sins: for “the Spirit lusteth against the flesh, *that we may not do the things which we would.*” And further—what a contrast is between the utterance of the man who is thus “filled with the Spirit,” and that of the man who is “drunk with wine.” We have seen what the latter is:—we have the former in the verse immediately following the expression quoted—“Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves: in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” Our Lord himself, in very solemn and awful terms, admonishes his people on this subject;* and the warnings of His apostles are no less impressive and powerful.† Yet does it not strike you as remarkable,—and is it not deserving of the notice of those of our brethren who are accustomed to speak of *abstinence* as the only true *temperance*,—that when our Lord himself,—“the great Teacher,”—whose *instructions*, as well as whose example, were perfect,—admonished his followers, in terms so solemn and alarming, against such excesses as were inconsistent with due vigilance, and might expose them to be taken by surprise at the coming of their Master,—he never should have thought of the “more excellent way” of preventing the evil against which he warns by an injunction of *abstinence*? Never, one should think, was there a more appropriate time for it. The very admonition shows that the sin was not a rare one, or their danger of falling into it a great unlikelihood. Yet we have nothing of the kind. The *use* is not interdicted, as the surest means of avoiding the *abuse*. The warning is solely against *excess*. Was this an oversight—an omission and imperfection in the Saviour’s teaching? It must not be said, there was not the same danger:—had there not been danger, there would not have been warning. Observe me—I find no fault with the man who, in attending to the Saviour’s admonition, acts upon the principle that the best and surest means of avoiding excess is, abstaining from

* See Matt. xxiv. 48: Luke xxi. 34.

† See Rom. xiii. 11—14; 1 Thess. v. 4—10.

whatever might tempt to it. He may act upon this principle himself; he may advise others to act upon it. All that is pleaded for is—that he do not condemn those, as disobeying the Saviour's admonition, who, whether in eating or drinking, can partake of God's bounties without the excess, and who, in so partaking, are imitating that Saviour's example.

I wished to have enlarged a little now on one or two topics that were touched upon in last discourse. But your time will by no means admit of my doing so. I then stated what I conceive to be the only reasonable basis on which the advocates of Abstinence Societies should ever attempt to found them;—namely, the principle contained in the Apostle's words—"It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak:"—that is, the principle of *self-denial for the good of others*,—or, in other words, *the expediency of having recourse to means, in some circumstances, which, in different circumstances, might be unnecessary and uncalled for*. It would, in my apprehension, have been well for their cause, had the friends of abstinence confined themselves to this ground. Although by no means to all Christian minds satisfactory to the extent to which they carry the application of the principle, or unobjectionable on other accounts,—yet to a certain degree it was solid. But by attempting to extend their foundation, they have weakened it. By seeking to prove too much, they have lost, in many minds, the hold they might have had. They have adopted principles which trench upon Christian liberty, by imposing human authority for divine, and condemning as sin what God has nowhere forbidden; which thus lead to uncharitable and censorious estimates of character; which require for their maintenance the violation of the canons of sound criticism and legitimate biblical interpretation; which, introduced into the church, would exclude from its communion many whom "Christ has received;" and, above all, which throw an injurious and most revolting reflection (how undesignedly and unconsciously soever, and I need not say I regard it as altogether so,) on the character of the all-perfect pattern of every excellence—

“the man Christ Jesus.” All this is to myself matter of sincere regret. The *object* they prosecute is one of unquestioned and primary excellence—the diminution and eradication of an evil of enormous magnitude, and the inlet to a deplorable variety and amount of other evils, both moral and physical, personal, domestic, and public. In so far as this object is prosecuted by scripturally legitimate means, we cannot but wish the prosecution of it God-speed. I avow my preference of means, as far as they can possibly be brought into operation, of a different description;—means that go more directly to the root of other evils as well as this,—that go immediately, that is, to the rectification of the principles of human conduct;—means, that leave less likelihood of the minds of those on whom they are brought to bear being absorbed in this one concern, deluded into the notion that the *temperance reformation* is all in all,—to make this reformation their righteousness, to put their sobriety in the place of godliness, their reformation for conversion; and, though cured of one great evil, and freed from the miserable effects arising from it, to live as really without God as before;—means, which, while they saved their objects from intemperance, would, at the same time, bring them to more than what the world call sobriety,—which would bring them to faith, to holiness, to God;—which would thus combine ends of which the combination is so desirable,—providing for “things that accompany salvation” as well as things that accompany outward virtue and this world’s well-being. Mistake me not. I do not mean that it is at all wrong to avail ourselves of motives and considerations of an inferior kind to those which relate to the high interests of the soul and eternity, in order to induce men to abandon an evil which so injuriously affects themselves, their families, and the community. I am far from saying or thinking so. The Holy Scriptures make frequent use of such motives:—but the Bible, at the same time, should be our pattern in combining both, and in placing the highest first. I have also, as I formerly said, more confidence in the permanence of the results, when the means by which they are produced involve

the infusion of *principle*. Is it so, as has been reported, that many of the Irish papists, who took the pledge from Father Matthew, are now, at the hands of other priests, getting absolution from their pledge for a shilling? So it is said. For my own part, I should rejoice to hear that it is *not true*:—but still, I should not be at all surprised if it *is*. It would only be an exemplification of what I stated last Lord's day—the slender hold we have on a man when such a pledge is unaccompanied with knowledge, and unfounded in just principle. In the case alluded to, the bond and the release are alike the fruit of ignorance. Ignorance takes it; ignorance is absolved from it;—the ignorance of a soul-deceiving superstition,—a superstition which would lead its victims to make a merit of the keeping of their pledge,—and yet to feel themselves not the less safe for giving it up when their release was obtained from priestly authority.

I do not vindicate either myself or others from culpability in not bringing more into active operation such means as those of which I *have* intimated my approbation. Be it so, that in this we have erred, and do err. That affects not the present question. I have formerly said, and say it again,—that I have been reluctant to utter a word that could by any be construed as if it were pointed against, and designed to hinder, the advance of a good cause,—of a great reformation. And yet, conscious as I am that my sole object is *truth*—the basing of Christian plans and Christian doings upon *right principles*;—why should I fear the result? *Essential truth*, in the *principles* on which we proceed, will be sure of producing ultimate good,—even should it, for a time, appear to interfere with it.

And now, having laid before you what I believe to be the mind of God on the subject that has occupied the last three morning lectures—I trust I may say without the charge of presumption, what my conscience tells me I say, though with confidence, without elation,—“I take you to record this day,” whether, either by what I *have* said or by what I have *not* said, I have justly incurred the heavy imputation of “*casting the weight of my influence into the scale of intemperance*.”

whether, for the last three Sabbath mornings, I have been "*employing myself in promoting the dreadful evil of intemperance!*" I have been describing its nature; exposing its sinfulness; shutting out those who are guilty of it from the kingdom of God both on earth and in heaven; showing its dreadful consequences, in time and eternity, and denouncing it in the name of the Lord. And I have been pleading for *temperance* as a Bible virtue, commanded by God, and exemplified by Christ, and a fruit of his Spirit in all who believe his truth. But, because I cannot see *temperance* and *abstinence* to be the same thing,—or, in the face of my Bible and of experience, assent to the position, that abstinence is the only and the incumbent means of promoting temperance, I must bear the weight of imputations, which, if true, would render the man who is justly chargeable with them unworthy ever to open a lip again as a minister of God's truth. My conscience acquits me of having ever, within my recollection, used a single passage of the word of God, during the whole course of my ministry, in a sense inconsistent with what I believed to be its meaning, or for a purpose aside from its design. On the present subject, my sole desire has been to ascertain the mind and will of the Lord; and whatever the Lord sayeth, *that* to speak: and I trust that, "through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ," I shall ever be enabled, faithfully and unflinchingly, mildly but firmly, without the "fear of man, which bringeth a snare,"—"fearing God, and knowing no other fear,"—to "declare unto you"—"shunning" no one part of it—"the whole counsel of God;"—"not walking in craftiness, not handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending myself to every man's conscience in His sight!"

LECTURE LX.

PROV. XX. 2—9.

“The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion; whoso provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul. It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling. The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing. Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water: but a man of understanding will draw it out. Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find? The just man walketh in his integrity; his children are blessed after him. A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes. Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?”

ON the first of these verses it is unnecessary to dwell.* “*The fear of a king*,” is evidently here put for that in a king, or in sovereign authority, which *causes* fear. Jacob is said to have sworn “by the fear of his father Isaac”—that is, by the *object* of his fear, and those attributes, considered as belonging to that object, from which reverence and dread arose. That in a king which subjects have reason to fear, is his *power*, and consequently his displeasure, when his laws are broken, or his will is thwarted,—when that power is clothed with judicial vengeance. Then, as “the roaring of a lion”—his roaring after his prey when famished with hunger,—agitates the bosom of the traveller with terror, so may the offender quake before the authority, the power, and the anger of royalty. In this our sinful world there is a necessity for government. It is the “ordinance of God;” and, like all His ordinances, *for good*.—The

* See chap. xvi. 14; xix. 12.

less of punitive threatening and coercion that can be made to answer the ends of salutary rule, so much the better; and the sounder the wisdom and the principle by which the system is constructed. But alas! in all communities there are ever to be found, “evil men,”—wicked, turbulent, unprincipled, rapacious characters, of whose hearts no hold can be got by measures of gentleness, who can be held in check only by fear, and by the strong arm of law. The terror of punishment requires to be held over them. I enter not into questions about its nature and degrees. I am persuaded that in no case but that of *murder* should *death* be resorted to; but we have at present nothing to do with such inquiries. All we have now to say is, that *laws* without *punitive sanctions* deserve not the name. A law that may be violated with impunity is *no law*.—By the “*king*,” in such passages is to be understood the government, or supreme judicial and executive authority, whether vested in one or in more; whether it be a monarchy, an aristocracy, a democracy, or, as in our own favoured and happy country, (for favoured and happy it is, in comparison with most other nations of the earth, notwithstanding all its occasional and even heavy sufferings,) a mixture of the three. Under every government there must be *fear*. *Love* is Jehovah’s universal law; but when men have thrown off the bonds of love, and refused the subjection of their hearts and lives to it, they must be assailed by fear. And under the government of God himself, “his *wrath* is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men;” and—“Who knoweth the power of his anger?” Under every *human* administration, the seditious and treasonable, the enemies of subordination, the selfish violators of the rights and privileges, the liberty and property of others, require to be sternly coerced. The *public weal* demands it. The man, therefore, who, by his conduct, brings upon himself the legal and judicial “wrath of the king”—that is, of the Government,—“sinneth against his *soul*,” or, rather, against his *life*. He may endanger and forfeit life itself—forfeit it to law, and to the general good.

There is a sense, indeed, in which the word *soul* may be

retained. The man who rebels against the government and salutary laws of his country, sins against *God*,—and in so doing he “sins against his *soul*,”—all sin, of every kind, bringing upon it guilt, and exposing it to the threatened consequences.*—If “the fear” of an earthly king is “like the roaring of a lion,”—how *fearful* must the fear be of the “King of kings, and Lord of lords!” One glance of the lightning of those “eyes which are as a flame of fire,” will shake the soul of the conscious sinner with the very terrors of death.

Verse 3. “It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling.”—There *may be* some connexion between this verse and the preceding. If “the wrath of the king is like the roaring of a lion,” then if a man’s strife is with the king, it is at least *safety* to cease from it; and it is also “*an honour*.”—But the words must be taken more generally. Strife is best let alone altogether—“left off before it be meddled with.” But suppose, in any case, *strife begun*:—is it an honour *still* to *cease* from it? Solomon says it is. This is not the world’s view of the matter;—not the view which human nature,—that nature, as it exists and operates, whether fully or in conflict with a better, in every one of us,—is disposed to like or to dictate. Quite the contrary. When we have started a controversy,—how trivial soever the matter in debate may be,—O how fond we naturally are to have *the last word*! To let our adversary have it is the keenest mortification. When it is affirmation against affirmation,—if he persists in repeating his, we persist in repeating ours. We feel as if the victory depended on *who should say it last*! We get impatient:—our voice rises; our face flushes; our eyes kindle; and our utterance is choked with passion:—or, on the contrary, knowing the temper of our opponent, we keep ourselves provokingly calm; and by our very calmness, cool and scornful, stir up, with secret delight, all his hasty passions,—all the fuel of his fiery spirit. If a man of the world’s honour has sent a challenge, he is bound to stand to the very last upon every

* See Rom. xiii. 1—5.

punctilio which the law of that honour has fixed, and to fight it out, till the honour of the last shot is determined by the fall of his adversary or himself. The man of a litigious spirit, having once instituted his process, and begun his suit, feels himself bound in honour (not the honour of high principle towards another, but a jealous and proud determination to maintain his own) to prosecute to the utmost; to go from the lowest court up to the highest, never resting short of the last appeal. No matter what the value of the litigated object may be—though a mere trifle—he must risk all that he is worth, rather than give in,—be ruined, rather than yield; because to yield, is dishonour: so his pride and folly think.

How different—how opposite, the principles and maxims of the Bible! “It is an *honour* to a man to *cease from strife*.” This is just saying, what, after all, must find the assent of every sound and calmly-thinking judgment,—that it is “an honour” to a man to have the command of his own passions;—that it is “an honour” to a man not to tamper selfishly and recklessly with the passions of others;—that it is “an honour” to a man to keep his ear candidly open to reason, and, when convinced, to yield to truth; that it is “an honour” to a man, not only to shun quarrels, but when,—in spite of the apostle’s warning, “if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men,”—he has unhappily been unable to avoid falling into one, to look at the cause of it with fairness, to admit the equity of every equitable claim, and the reasonableness of every reasonable explanation,—and, when an opponent discovers an indomitable spirit of stubbornness, passion, and pride with which there is obviously no dealing, and which there is no hope of bringing to anything like calm and fair settlement,—instead of persisting, quietly to leave him to himself, rather than, by imitating his spirit, to make matters worse; that it is “an honour” to a man never to go unjustly or even needlessly to law with others; and, when obliged to have recourse to it, never to persist further in a process than is necessary to ascertain with clearness what the law of the case is; never either to institute a plea, or to maintain and urge it on, *for pleading’s*

sake, and in the spirit of reckless and resentful pride, but to be rather the last to begin, and the first to give up. In a word, the spirit of peace and love and concord is the Bible spirit of *honour*. And it is the spirit of *wisdom* too; for in the second clause of the verse it is added—"But every *fool* will be meddling." These are pithy words. They afford another exemplification of the identity of human nature in Solomon's days and in our own. How many such fools there are still!

"*Meddling*" means meddling with other people and other people's concerns—so as to *provoke quarrels with himself*,—and still further to *excite and foment them between others*. In the former case, they often "meddle" to their own hurt; picking quarrels, and suffering by them. Amaziah, the king of Judah, was one of these meddling fools; and he "meddled to his hurt."* Abraham presents a fine example of the opposite spirit—the spirit of "meekness of wisdom."† How many *prying* and *officious* fools are there!—who are ever peering into matters with which they have nothing to do,—and obtruding their sage advice where it is not wanted, and provoking people to say—What business is it of yours? And then these same fools will put in their word or their finger in other people's quarrels. Even when the adversaries might, if left to themselves, "cease from strife," the "meddling" of these fools will keep it up and foment it to greater violence. They say *this* to one, and *that* to the other,—by which they stimulate the passions of both, inflame their pride and resentment, and confirm their alienation. The whole matter might have been settled but for them. O how much have such intermeddling fools to answer for! They may call themselves *friends*; but they are the enemies of the parties, and the enemies of mankind, and their own enemies to boot.

Verse 4. "The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing." How very frequently has the character of the sluggard come before us! In the present occurrence of it, there are *two* particulars which may be noticed:—

* See 2 Chron. xxv. 8—14.

† Gen. xiii. 7—9.

1. *How fertile sloth ever is in excuses!* On all occasions it is so—proverbially so. It finds its excuses for inactivity in the very considerations that are fitted to produce exertion. Thus it is here. Cold, sharp, bracing weather is the very weather which, in seed-time, the husbandman looks for; and the very weather which renders labour the least exhausting. And yet this is the sluggard's plea for inaction:—"the sluggard will not plow *by reason of the cold.*" The same indolence, which finds an apology in the *cold* of seed-time, will readily find an apology for doing nothing, equally good, in the *heat* of summer. It is never, indeed, at a loss. Silence one plea,—another is ready; and with each one of them, "the sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason."

2. *The consequence* of indolence thus indulged:—"Therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing." This is the consequence that might be anticipated from the *nature of things*. The man who, from indolence, will not *plow*, and will not, therefore, *sow*, cannot expect to *reap*. And it is, moreover, the *just* consequence. "He receives," I was going to say, "the due reward of his deeds." I should rather say of his *no-deeds*.

I am disposed to think that the two expressions "he shall *beg in harvest*, and *have nothing*," do not mean *the same thing*,—namely, that, as the result of his indolence, he shall then be in a *state of destitution*,—he shall "*have nothing*" signifying the same as he shall "*beg*"—be reduced to beggary. Observe, it is not said, He shall *have nothing*, and *shall beg*; but he shall *beg*, and *have nothing*. He shall *beg of others*, from his fields yielding him no subsistence; and, his claim to sympathy not being admitted,—there being no justice in it, and his own egregious folly shutting up the bowels of compassion towards him,—he shall "*have nothing*" even by his beggary. He shall be in the condition of the prodigal son, when "no man gave unto him."—Harvest is the time of reaping and ingathering. It is a joyous time. They who have held the plough, and scattered the seed, and covered it with the harrow, and cleaned their

fields, and looked for "the early and the latter rain," then cut down the waving crops, and gather them into the barn;—they have a gladsome *harvest-home*. And while all this busy toil and festive mirth is going on around him, the wretched sluggard has nought whereon to look but his bare fields—from which "the mower filleth not his hand, nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom." He may sigh at length over the sad result, and wish the seed-time back again; but the fault is his own, and wishes and regrets are alike vain. And no one pities him; or, if any do, it is a pity at once condemnatory and scornful. Again, then—and again, I say unto you—"NOTHING WITHOUT LABOUR."

Verse 5. "Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water: but a man of understanding will draw it out." We have the power of communication; but not the power of intuitive acquaintance with each other's thoughts and purposes, or the views which our minds respectively take of particular subjects. But there are ways of *getting at* the minds of others:—just as there are ways of getting at water though the well is deep. In the latter case, we apply the windlass and the bucket; and from many a fathom down, where the spring bubbles in silence and darkness, we bring the water to the surface for our use.—The verse may be taken as referring to the man of *deep, designing policy*; who exercises a firm control over his lips; cherishes his plans and purposes in the inaccessible secret places of his own mind; keeps his counsel; never blabs; all depth and mystery:—or to the *reserved man*—the man of deep and shrewd sagacity, but of modest diffidence and of few words,—thinking much and well, but saying little.

Taken in reference to the former of these two characters,—the meaning will be, that the "man of understanding" will "draw it out," in order that he may be upon his guard, and put others upon theirs. His object is, the detection of hidden counsels,—of deeply concealed designs, that he may take precautions against them, so as to shun and evade the threatened evil. The sagacity, which marks symptoms and circumstances, and by the study of human nature and of

peculiarities of character, forms its shrewd guesses, and then, by direct or indirect inquiries, put with a penetrating eye upon the countenance, converts these guesses into certainty, worming out from the mind of the man of policy, ere he is himself aware, his most secret intentions,—may, in many cases, be eminently advantageous. Exercised in prudence and in benevolence, not in mere curiosity, and far less in malice, it is a very valuable power. The skilful general, who has studied the tactics of his opponent, is often able more than to guess what his movements, in any given circumstances, will be,—how solicitous soever he may be to keep them secret,—and will make his own precautionary arrangements, or plan his mode of attack accordingly; keeping quiet, advancing, retreating, changing position, or at once giving battle, as the case may be. And so may a sagacious statesman dive into the secret counsels of a political adversary; shrewdly surmising the course which, in certain circumstances, his principles or his views of political expediency will suggest. Thus, in ordinary life, in daily intercourse, may the man of sagacity, in many instances, more than guess the thoughts and purposes of others, in a way that may be of essential service to him, for the guidance of his own movements.—There is, at the same time, it should be observed, a *per contra* side of this view of the case. There may be times and circumstances, when it is particularly necessary for us that we keep *our own* counsel; that we reserve what is in our own minds; that we do not allow our secret purposes prematurely to discover themselves; when such discovery would bring the risk of frustration to plans on which much depends;—and when, therefore, we behave to be on our guard against “the man of understanding” who would “draw out our counsels.” There are the curious and the prying, as well as the self-interested, who, by side insinuations, and seemingly far off and incidental questionings, put with an assumed simplicity, are trying to worm out our secrets,—letting down buckets in the dark. It may be our duty to see to it, that their buckets come up empty.

As to the other case, that of the *reserved* man,—there is

great and valuable art in "drawing out" his mind. The counsel which it contains may be sound and precious; but, unless skilfully elicited, it will remain where it is, and be lost. The discovery of it is *worth the pains*. But all have not the art. It requires peculiar tact. Even of the reserved the characters vary; and there is need for accommodation to the particular turn of each, in order to success. What would a thirsty man do, who had nothing to draw with, and the well was deep? Necessity, if he was a man of understanding, would be the mother of invention. He would set his wits to work, to construct some mechanical means of reaching the water. And thus will the intelligent and discriminative man find his way into the mind of the backward and reserved, and draw out for use its secret counsels. But for such a power and skill, a great deal of valuable wisdom might be lost for any practical purpose in society:—and to the man who draws it out, and puts it upon record, or brings it into use, society is not a little indebted.

And ere I pass to another verse, does not the observation force itself upon your notice,—if any such value attaches to "counsel in the heart of man," as to render it worth pains to "draw it out,"—O at what pains should we be to understand the counsel of God,—the counsel of the infinite Mind! That is counsel, which we cannot "draw out." It must come spontaneously; it must be graciously revealed; for who hath known the mind of the Lord? And it *has been*. It is *in his word*—made known to his "holy apostles and prophets, by his Spirit."* And by them it has been communicated to us. What is necessary to salvation is to all simple and easily accessible. "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." *This* is not deep water, which it is difficult to reach. All may reach it; and all freely partake of it. But there is much in the Bible which *does* require investigation and pains;—water, and living water too, which

* 1 Cor. ii. 9—12, 16.

must be brought from the deep well. We should earnestly seek spiritual understanding, that we may be able, by diligent pains of study, to “draw it out.”

Verse 6. “Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?” The Apostle Paul, with much emphasis, delivers the following admonition:—“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.” Human nature has been ever characterised by a tendency to over-estimate its own worth—and a propensity to let that worth be known. There are men, indeed, who “glory in their *shame*,” who proclaim their vices; their intemperance, their lewdness, their quarrels, their revenge; who, instead of making a secret of these, make them their open boast, and laugh to scorn the tameness of virtue. But, as Solomon here expresses it—“*Most men* will proclaim every one his own *goodness*.” By some the word is taken here in its more restricted sense—a sense in which, without doubt, it is often used, as meaning kindness, benevolence, generosity. But there is nothing in the spirit or principle of the statement, that at all requires its restriction. What is true respecting goodness in the restricted, is true respecting goodness in the general sense. But the manner in which men make known what they account their goodness, is very various. Some are *open* with it. They almost literally “*proclaim*” it, upon the house-tops. To every individual, and in every company, they speak of it,—of what they are, of what they have said, of what they have done, of what they think, and of what they wish and intend to do. And O! if they had but the means! what would they not accomplish!

Some there are who are quite as vain, and as ambitious of commendation and praise, who, knowing that everything of the nature of *ostentation* is exceedingly unpopular, and lets a man down, and tempts others to pluck his feathers from him,—set about their object with greater art. They *devise* ways of getting their merits made known so as to avoid

the flaw of ostentatious self-display. In company, they commend *others* for the qualities which they conceive *themselves* specially to possess, or for the doing of deeds which they themselves are sufficiently well known to have done; and they turn the conversation dexterously that way; or they find fault with others for the want of the good they are desirous to get praise for; or they lament over their own deficiencies and failures in the very points in which they conceive their excellence to lie—to give others the opportunity of contradicting them; or, if they have done anything they deem particularly generous and praise-worthy, they introduce some similar case, and bring in, as apparently accidental and unintentional a way as possible, the situation of the person or the family that has been the object of their bounty. In a thousand ways, as it may happen, they contrive to get in *themselves* and *their goodness*.

As an exemplification of the anxiety to have what they do *known* and to get the credit of it—I might instance *liberality* or *charity*. Our Saviour enjoined unostentatious privacy:—"Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth."* But what a rarity is this! And how exceedingly apt are we, even so far to impose upon our deceitful hearts, as to try to unite what, in *principle*, never *can* be united;—and to do the thing in such a way as to ensure its being known, while at the same time the charge of *ostentation* is avoided!—so as that we may get commendation both for the *act* and for the manner of it! This is the *hypocrisy* of self-proclamation, that keeps self out of view; for the very purpose of putting self forward. It is on the same principle that we can satisfy ourselves with giving less to a collection for any object,—where the individual is lost in the aggregate,—than we should put down for the same object, in a subscription paper,—where each appears singly and in favourable or unfavourable comparison. O! we do grudge so much doing anything that is really creditable without getting the credit for the doing of it! Let us cultivate more simplicity

* Matt. vi. 1—4.

of principle—more singleness of eye; and let us not forget, that, according to our Saviour's words, in proportion as we admit into the motives by which we are actuated the "love of the praise of men," we in the same proportion deduct from the approbation and "praise of God,"—the God who "trieth the hearts." O that we had grace to set a greater value on *God's own judgment of us*, and less on that of men; that so "our Father who seeth in secret may reward us openly!"

"The Scriptures declare," says Dr. Lawson on this passage, "that a truly good man is rarely to be found; and yet, if men's own word could be taken, there is scarcely a bad man to be found." This is a true saying. Even those who boast of what others call their vices, are, at the same time, ever ready with an offset of redeeming virtues. They are no rarities who speak well of themselves, and defend themselves from the imputation of evil; which, when they can not entirely disown, they palliate, and balance with compensatory good.

"*But a faithful man who can find?*"—A *faithful* man seems here to mean, a man thoroughly and conscientiously *faithful to principle*—who in heart and in life is *true to men*, and *true to God*. He is one whom fellow-men can implicitly and fearlessly trust; who deals not in talk, in promise and protestation, the verbiage of goodness; but who considers and weighs his words, and says nothing, but what he verifies in action;—who carries resolutely out, in all things, the principle of the royal law; and of whom, therefore, all have the satisfactory assurance, that he will not be less regardful of the characters and interests of others, than he is of his own. He is one too who, in regard to *himself*, is jealous of the tendencies of which we have been speaking; keeps within the limits of sober truth, and keeps *self* in the back ground, except where duty to character, to usefulness, and to the cause to which he is devoted, requires self-vindication and self-eulogy. For such occasions there are. Paul felt this. He was falsely charged, and his apostolic authority questioned; his usefulness was thus injured; and the

cause of the gospel, and of the church, and of his Master, was involved in danger; and it became indispensable for him to speak of himself, and to state and give prominence to facts which he had long kept secret; and which, but for the operation of these circumstances, might have died with him. We almost feel indebted to his adversaries, for having thus drawn from him, in terms of dignified eloquence, what we should not otherwise have known, and our ignorance of which would have deprived us of a valuable example. Paul, in all this, acted the part of a "faithful man," not to himself alone, but to the Lord whom he served. Which leads me to the higher point, that "a faithful man" is one who is always unswervingly *true to God*. To HIM he has to give his account. He is aware of the principles of action which He approves; and, without regard to the fear or the favour, the smiles or the frowns of men, or the seeming temptations of present self-interest, he seeks grace to adhere to these principles,—the only principles, he knows, that will be looked to in the judgment; foregoing, it may be, present *eclat* and present advantage, satisfied that "the day will declare it," and that "his Father who seeth in secret will reward him openly!"—O well may we say—regarding the character in this high and holy light, "A faithful man who can find?"

The first clause of the following verse—"The just man walketh in his integrity,"—has by some been rendered—"He that walketh in his integrity is a just or righteous man." And this will correspond precisely with New Testament statements.* There is no man who is in *state* just before God, who is not under the predominant and habitual influence of the principles of righteousness. "*Walking in his integrity*" means this:—means his maintaining a regular, steadfast, persevering course of obedience; abhorring that which is evil, and cleaving to that which is good."

"His children are blessed after him,"—in the benefits derived from his instructions and example; not blessed it may be in an inheritance of worldly wealth, but in an *in-*

* John ii. 29; iii. 7; Rom. viii. 1.

heritance of principles; and in the promise of God's covenant realized in their happy experience, "I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee."*

Verse 8. "A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes."—The subject, under other forms of expression, and in other points of light, has been repeatedly before us.†

To "*sit in the throne of judgment*" must evidently be understood as meaning to occupy that seat *in righteousness*; and to dispense judgment from it according to right principles. On any other supposition, it would cease to be the throne of judgment, and become the throne of iniquity—"framing mischief by a law." Thus marked by righteousness was Solomon's judicial administration, in the outset of his reign.‡ Our kings do not now occupy personally the judgment-seat. But the principle of the words is applicable to all *judges*. The seat they occupy is one of deep and solemn responsibility—one of lofty dignity—one of commanding authority. The sentiments, and feelings, and manner, with which it is occupied, ought to correspond with its character and the nature of its functions. There must be no levity,—no littleness of self-satisfaction,—no obliquity of principle,—no partialities, and predilections, and prejudices; but the calm majesty of truth and justice. In the very looks, there ought to be the condemnation of all evil and guilt, and the assurance of protection and favour to innocence. The judge's glance should make offenders quail. He should thus "scatter away evil with his eyes"—putting it out of countenance,—covering it with shame,—frowning it away from him by merited severity, or subduing it to penitence by the searching eye of tenderness.

The words may justly be applied, in the spirit of them, to the *court* of royal personages. There, their "eyes should scatter away evil." Everything indecent and indecorous should make the eye of majesty flash rebuke, and banish the offence.

* Comp. Psal. ciii. 17, 18.

† Chap. xvi. 14, 15; xix. 12; xx. 2.

‡ See 1 Kings iii. 28.

But the difficulties which surround even the most upright and best-intentioned princes, are not small, by reason of the universal corruption of our fallen nature; a corruption in which their subjects and themselves are alike involved. Those who are most aware of this,—of the imperfection common to rulers with all others,—and of the vast amount of varied materials of evil with which they have to do, will be most disposed,—as far as is consistent with fidelity to the public good,—to make charitable allowances for the errors and failures into which the very soundest and best disposed of rulers may at times fall. Possibly something of this kind may be the association of suggestion that connects the *ninth* verse with this:—"Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?"—This question may be viewed in various lights.

We may apply it in regard to original sin—the hereditary taint of our apostate nature:—That there *is* such a taint—such an absence of the *right* and only principle of all true goodness,—such an innate tendency to defection from God, and to what is evil,—might, on philosophical principles, be demonstrated from the facts of the case,—from the absolute impossibility of accounting reasonably for the universality of sin in the whole species, and in every individual of every generation,—on any other hypothesis. And that such is the representation of Scripture, might be shown, from the pervading tenor of the whole Bible, and from many explicit passages.* This universal inherent sinfulness of nature was, I cannot doubt, in Solomon's mind, when he wrote the words before us.

2. They proceed too on the universally Scriptural assumption, that all that is truly and spiritually good in the heart of man is the product of divine operation—of the renewing influence of God's Spirit: "Who can say," that is, say with truth—"I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?"—If the position of the apostle be a true one, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God," there can hardly be a greater

* See Job xiv. 4; xv. 14; Psal. li. 4; John iii. 6; Rom. viii. 7.

absurdity than is involved in the idea of spontaneously originating *self-change—self-conversion*; of enmity changing itself into love—choosing to love the object of its hatred!

3. The words more than imply,—under the form of a question they strongly affirm,—that the purification of the heart *is in no man perfect here*. There is a purity of heart ascribed to God's people, and characteristic of them. God's children are "renewed in the spirit of their mind." But still—"Who shall say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?"—There have been some who have presumed to say it. But what is *the truth*? It is easy to say it; but it will not be easy to make it good, in direct contradiction of the explicit affirmations of Scripture.* We may be perfectly sure, that the idea of sinless perfection in any case is a delusion. Were it in any one case realized, it would cease to be true, that "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." And to the question in the text—"Who can say, I am pure from my sin?"—it might, in that case, be answered—*I am*. It must, therefore, be either a melancholy proof of the power of self-deception,—or a shocking manifestation of the extravagance of hypocritical pretension. It is a characteristic of God's children, that they see, as they advance heavenward, more and more reason for self-abasement;—not that they sin more; for they become holier—but their views, at the same time, of the *purity of God* become fuller and stronger. The glass in which they view themselves becomes clearer and more faithful. Little sins, to minds growing in holiness, become more loathsome. Yet "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

* Eccl. vii. 20; 1 John i. 7—9

LECTURE LXI.

PROV. XX. 10—14.

“Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the Lord. Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right. The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them. Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty: open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread. It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.”

IN the original, as intimated on the margin of our English Bible, the terms of the verse before us are—“*A stone and a stone,*” (or *a weight and a weight*) “*an ephah and an ephah.*” The meaning is plain. A man, we shall suppose,—would that it were, in no case, more than supposition!—has one set of weights and measures to *sell* with, and another to *buy* with; one set for his customers, and another for the inspector; one set for customers that are ignorant and unwary, and another for those who know the trade, and are too shrewd to be easily imposed upon; one set for the poor, the widow, the orphan, the dependent, who cannot, or who dare not, seek redress, and another for persons of influence, with whom it is dangerous to trifle. But under this particular phraseology, are to be comprehended all fraudulent dealings whatsoever, in every department of business, or of mutual transaction between man and man. Nothing can be clearer than that a short yard is as bad as a light weight or a scanty measure:—and that there is the very same sin also, in having different articles at the same prices, or the same articles at different prices, for the purpose of imposing on the igno-

rant. It is a repetition of the great practical truth—that there ought to be nothing, in any of our transactions, but what is open, straightforward, upright, and impartial; no chicanery; no double-dealing; nothing one hairbreadth aside from the line of the most rigid rectitude;—all as in the sight of that God, whom not the most secret and skilful attempt at imposition can escape, and to whom, as is frequently and solemnly reiterated, everything of the kind is “*an abomination.*”*

And if, in the dealings of the shop and the market, partiality and unrighteousness are thus severely reprobated, how much more when found in the “*seat of judgment.*” JUSTICE is usually, when personified, represented with bandaged eyes and an evenly poised balance in her hand: intimating that she must shut her eyes fast against every temptation, every bribe to unfairness; must use no false evidence, no false pleas, nor give any one atom of proof greater or less weight, on either side, than belongs to it; nor, in awarding punishment, employ “*an ephah and an ephah,*”—one measure of recompense for one delinquent, and another for another. Such conduct is worse on the judgment-seat than at the counter, as the sphere is of a higher order; and whether it be in the department of the civil magistracy, or in the administration of the discipline of the house of God, the evil is alike obnoxious to the divine displeasure.

Verse 11. “Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right.” Few of the verses of this book have been more variously understood and rendered than this.

1. In the first place, we have our own received version just quoted. If here, the “*doings*” and the “*work*” mean the same thing, as they seem to do, it may be asked, Where lies the difficulty? The “*doings*” of the child are supposed to be seen and known, what difficulty can there be in discovering whether *these very doings* be pure and right? To this the only answer that gives any appropriate meaning to the sentence, must be,—that the expression

* For further illustration, see chap. xi. 1; xvi. 11.

"whether his work be *pure* and whether it be *right*" has reference to the *disposition*, the *state of mind and heart*, the *motive*, by which it is prompted. This gives, unquestionably, a true and important sense. A child's *dispositions*,—their purity and rectitude, or the contrary,—may be discovered from his "*doings*." In these there is no little diversity very early apparent. They are kind or cruel; they are open or full of trick and deceit; they are selfish or generous; they are rash or well-weighed and prudent. In "*doings*" of these various descriptions, dispositions and tempers, of corresponding variety, discover themselves; and by the discovery, parents and guardians should be regulated in their modes of dealing with the subjects of them. The same treatment would never do for all.

2. Another translation is—"Even a child, by his behaviour, will discover, (or make it known,) whether what he hath done be innocent and right."* It is curious, and in some cases amusing, to observe this. Symptoms of conscience begin to show themselves; but it is often in such a way, that the very means they use for concealment become the means of detection. There is, perhaps, when they know they have done something wrong, a want of their usual frankness and openness, a timidity and shrinking from observation, looks of apprehensive jealousy, and an interpretation of everything in the looks and words of others, as if it had a meaning that bore upon them, and upon what they have done; and at times,—where there is much of the artless simplicity of childhood, blending itself with that natural disregard of truth which manifests itself wherever self-interest or fear requires falsehood,—an over-eagerness to deny what, but for the denial, might never have been known; a lie thus bewraying the truth. A close observer of the behaviour of children may see a vast deal of this self-detecting behaviour on the one hand, where evil has been done; and of that open, undisguised artlessness on the other, by which innocence becomes its own witness.

* Hodgson.

3. Another considers the present indications as having reference to *the future*:—"Even a youth makes himself known by his doings, whether his work—that is, his future work, his course of life—*will be pure*, and whether it *will be right*."*

This is a very important meaning in regard to its practical utility. Moral depravity is the sad birthright of our fallen nature. But this betrays itself in a great variety of modes. Every one "goes astray;" but still, "each in his own way." According to peculiar circumstances and particularities of temperament, the common corruption assumes various aspects, and takes different directions. Here then is an important lesson for parents. They should feel the propriety and necessity of watching over specially strong tendencies to particular evils; of bending a peculiarly vigilant eye on the sin which, in early life, seems most easily to beset the childish mind; and, on the other hand, of cherishing, with an assiduous and constant care, every symptom of good which, by the blessing of God, presents itself. If it be right for parents to note the diversity in the natural and early apparent *talents*, *turns of mind*, and *genius* of their children, for the purpose of directing them in their choice of a business or a profession in life, surely their dispositions—their moral tendencies, are much more to be watched, and guarded, and guided. It is well when mental superiority exists in union with moral worth. But Christian parents, I say anew, should hold and act upon the principle, that the slenderest intellect, with a heart on the side of God, is incomparably more desirable in any of their children, than powers of mind of even colossal greatness associated with a heart under the sway of the world and sin; that a *weak saint* is better than an *accomplished devil*.—And in dealing with the good and evil symptoms of future character that discover themselves in childhood, let parents beware of a species of partiality to which they are exceedingly prone,—the partiality which treats the *evil* symptoms as if they were only the indications of a childish ignorance and thoughtlessness which time will, as a matter of course,

* Schulz.

correct, and which need not therefore occasion much alarm, and need not the application of any very careful or solicitous restraint,—while every symptom of *good* that appears is trusted to, applauded, flattered, and everything expected from it; as if, in a world such as ours, there were not imminent danger every moment of its suffering deterioration and even extinction,—of its being nipped in the bud or the blossom; and therefore requiring the most vigilant and anxious care in its shelter and cultivation. O let not believing parents, who know from their Bibles what human nature is, act, in the education of their children, as if the evil were exotic and the good indigenous,—as if the evil had slight hold of the soil and were sure to wither, and the good firmly rooted and sure to thrive.

4. The senses I have mentioned, proceed on the assumption that the Hebrew word rendered “*is known*,” or *makes himself known*, is derived from a particular root that has the signification of *knowing, knowing again, or recognizing*. By some eminent critics, however, this is more than doubted. The word is considered as belonging to another root, of which the signification is to *make one’s self strange, to pretend to be other than one is, to dissemble*. In support of this are quoted—Gen. xlii. 7; 1 Kings xiv. 5, 6. In these passages we have the same word—rendered “made himself strange;” “feigned herself another.” The verse has therefore been translated:—“Even a youth will, in his doings, act the dissembler,—that in truth his work is pure, that in truth it is right.”* This not only seems to agree with the right meaning of the word; but harmonizes naturally with the connexion in which it occurs—following a verse that so directly relates to *deceit*.

No one can have watched the tendencies of childhood, without observing how early and how strong, whenever there is the least tempting occasion for it, is the propensity to *dissembling*; to deny the wrong they have done, and to affirm the good they have not done; concealing, by artifice and

* Parkhurst and Schultens.

falsehood, what they know will be condemned and subject them to punishment; and pretending the contrary, what they know will get them safety from punishment and the smile of approbation.

This natural disposition grows by success. It becomes habitual. It is the commencement—the germ—of all the dishonesties, the lies, and the frauds of the subsequent life. The opposite disposition and practice,—openness and candour,—frankness and simplicity of confession, with the sinfulness and the danger of all dissimulation,—should be carefully and constantly impressed on the youthful spirit. And example ought ever to be in accordance with the instructions and admonitions given. Children are often a great deal more sharp-sighted than foolish parents give them credit for. If they ever hear their parents *saying*, though it may not be to themselves, what they know not to be strictly *true*, or if they see them *do* what they have sense enough to discern not to be strictly *honest*,—what can those parents reasonably expect?—to have their counsels attended to and obeyed? and their corrections taken in a spirit likely to render them of any service? The expectation were folly. Their corrections, in such circumstances, are unjust and cruel. *On themselves* ought the chastisement to be inflicted. *Their* backs should bear the stripes. Parents, and servants entrusted with the care of children, should be exceedingly cautious in avoiding everything approaching to simulation in their treatment of them. I know nothing more pernicious. It should never be resorted to, even for a *good* purpose. Be assured that the *detection* of the dissimulation will do much more harm than that which is avoided by the dissimulation itself. There are many common practices, in the management of children, which it would be well for all who have the care of them to shun. How often are children, when they cry or are fractious, quieted,—or the attempt at least made to quiet them,—by telling them *what is not true*! This is done in different ways. What is told is something frightful, and is meant to alarm them; or it is something pleasing, that is meant to soothe them; but neither the one thing nor the other has any ex-

istence. Something is promised, which is not to be given,—which, it is known perhaps, *cannot* be given:—or something is threatened, which is not to be executed. The things themselves may be trifling; but there is nothing trifling to a child:—they may be the thoughtless figments of fancy, but the child has not learned to distinguish between fancy and reality. It is all bad; initiating children in habits of light estimation of truth, and the harmlessness of dissembling for a present purpose. And allow me to say to nursery servants, who have so much in their power in regard to the early impressions on the minds of children,—that they ought to be specially on their guard against making children parties with themselves in any acts of dissembling with their parents. This is the most shocking of all lessons. O let no consideration of preventing their own detection in what is wrong, ever tempt them to put children, who have seen and known their fault, on the practice of concealment, prevarication, and falsehood, with their own father or mother. The thing is fearful. Let all be openness, sincerity, candour, truth, at every hazard:—no sporting with evil; no equivocation; no laughing at successful artifice; nothing but what the God of truth, who “desireth truth in the inward parts,” will mark with approbation.

Verse 12. “The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them.”—Our whole frame is of divine contrivance, and divine workmanship; and truly it is a structure of most complicated and exquisite mechanism; a little world of wonders; where, the longer and the more closely we examine, the more we are confounded, and lost in admiration. The man who can inspect it, and doubt of a God, is beyond the reach of argument. The Psalmist utters the language of sound reason, as well as of piety, when he says—“I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.” And of the human frame, there are no parts more wonderful, in their contrivance and execution, and the delicate and intricate nicety of their adaptation to their respective functions,—than “*the seeing eye and the*

hearing ear.”—The *eye*, by its admirable combination of coats, and humours, and lenses, produces on the retina, or expansion of nerve at the back of the socket or boney cavity in which it is so securely lodged, a distinct picture of the minutest or largest object; so that, on a space that is less than an inch in diameter, a landscape of miles in extent, with all its variety of scenery, is depicted with perfect exactness of relative proportion in all its parts! And how complex and delicate is “the hearing ear!”—by no means less wonderful than the eye, though less exposed to human observation, lying deep, except its outer part, in the bones of the head. What the eye is to light, the ear is to sound. And how divinely perfect its construction! so strong, as not to be painfully affected by the burst and roll of the loudest thunder; and yet so delicately sensitive as to receive impressions of sound from those undulations of the air that are produced by the very softest whisper!

But “the hearing ear and the seeing eye” include something more than this—and still more wonderful. What I have mentioned, is but the *mechanism*. We can, by attending to the laws of vision and sound, produce something that, in structure and in mechanical or physical effect, bears some analogy to them. But this is not *sight*; this is not *hearing*. These imply perception. And to perception there are requisite an auditory and an optic nerve, that convey the sensations of sound and vision to the brain; and a *perceiving mind*,—an immaterial, spiritual, thinking substance, essence, element—or what else shall we call it? that thus receives its perceptions of things heard and things seen!—O! this is the highest and deepest wonder of all! The mechanical structure we can trace out and demonstrate. We can show how, by the laws of transmission and refraction, the picture is made on the retina of the eye; and how, by the laws of sound, the yielding, tremulous, undulating air affects the *tympanum*, or drum, of the ear. But we can get no farther. *How* it is that the mind receives its perceptions,—how it is that *it* is affected,—what is the nature of nervous influence, or of the process by which, through the medium of the

nerves and the brain, thought is produced in the mind,—of all this we are profoundly ignorant.

But although the mention of “the hearing ear and the seeing eye” has naturally led to such remarks,—it is not, certainly, for the purpose of setting forth the skill of the Maker, that Solomon, in this place, introduces them. The verse seems to bear a very intelligible connexion with the two preceding, though to some it may not be apparent. *Dishonesty* and *dissimulation*, whether practised by old or young, might escape the detection of men, but *not of God*. He who made both “the hearing ear and the seeing eye”—shall HE not hear and see? Remember, then, all, this deeply solemn fact: GOD sees you, GOD hears you.—Further, let those who possess, in healthy soundness, the “hearing ear and the seeing eye,” be thankful to God for the blessing. There are “ears which hear not, and eyes which see not.” Ponder well the question, intended to engender at once humility and gratitude,—“Who maketh thee to differ?”—and let this consideration impress all, the young especially, with the criminality of either mocking, or taking advantage of, the deaf or the blind. The Lord will avenge them.* Be ye, as far as lieth in you, “ears to the deaf, and eyes to the blind!”—Further, strive to *make a right use* of these precious organs of hearing and of sight, remembering that to the divine Maker of them you are answerable for the use to which you turn them.—Lastly, the *hearing ear* and the *seeing eye*, in a far more important meaning of the terms, are from God. Spiritual hearing and spiritual sight are His gift. “The hearing ear” is the *obedient* ear—the disposition to do God’s will:—the seeing eye is the understanding—the spiritually understanding mind. Both come from “the God of all grace.” There are, in Scripture phrase, “the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears,”—who “having eyes see not, and having ears hear not.” This is their guilt. It is the depravity of the heart that is the only obstructing film on the eye of the understanding in regard to the things of God.

* See Lev. xix. 14.

It is this that disposes the sinner, like "the deaf adder," to shut his ear to the "voice of the charmer."

In the next verse we have the recurrence again of an oft-repeated maxim, that *sloth brings ruin; diligence prosperity*:—"Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread."

Verse 14. "It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth." The word rendered "the *buyer*," has also the signification, very naturally, of the *possessor*. Hence *two* views have been taken of the meaning of the verse.—One critic of eminence* renders thus:—"Worthless! worthless! says the possessor: but when the thing is gone from him (is lost) then he praises it!" According to this view, the sentiment expressed is, the comparatively light value we attach to what is actually in our possession; whereas, when we can no longer command the possession, we immediately perceive, feel, or fancy its preciousness. Good in *possession* appears less in value; good in *expectation*, greater—like objects seen at a distance, through a particular medium. We praise the *absent*, we depreciate the *present* good.—Then there is the more ordinary sense; which appears also to be the true one. The reference is to the acts of the "*buyer*," to procure a good bargain; and the disposition to boast of his success. In this sense, the case, as it appears to have been common in the days of Solomon, is certainly no less so now. It occurs every day, and every hour, in all the departments of business,—in every market. "Bad—bad—very bad! You never surely can think of asking, far less of getting, such a price for this! It is far from being an article worth anything like the money." Thus the buyer goes on, running down what he wants to purchase; yet, all the while, he is perfectly satisfied that the article is one of the best of its kind, and the price put upon it exceedingly reasonable. Now, what, I ask, is this but *lying*?—plain downright lying? It is *saying what we do not think*: and wherein does that differ from ly-

* Schultens.

ing?—In thus cheapening and underrating the value of what we are about to purchase, we *tell a lie*, or a *tissue of lies*, to get a bargain! And all that we may afterwards have a good story to tell of our skill and success in gaining our end:—“When he is gone his way, then he *boasteth!*” But of what does he “boast?” Does he not glory in his shame?—glory in what it were easy for any man even of the meanest modicum of intellect to do, if he could only satisfy his conscience so far as to say what he did not think; or could muster up hardihood enough to put upon the falsehood a face of sincerity?

And the principle of the verse has the very same force of application on the side of the *seller*; when he seeks to make a good bargain for himself by over-praising and over-valuing his article,—representing it as possessing qualities that do not belong to it, or real qualities in a greater degree than truth warrants;—and demanding for it, as its *bonâ fide* value, a higher price than he knows it to be really worth. It is evident, that in these two cases, the evil is the very same. It is the evil of violating truth for self-interest, or for the credit of skill in bargain-making. The “boasting” is, in every case, “glorying in our shame.” I apprehend that the same evil is committed, though less directly, by the common practice of concealing the known defects and faults of the article we sell. What is the great difference between the *seller* concealing faults which *do* exist, and the *buyer* alleging faults which do *not* exist? It will not do, in the estimate of strict integrity, to say—“He saw his article; he had full opportunity to inspect and examine it; he need not have taken it unless he chose.” All true: but the plain and palpable fact still stands—you have taken a price for your article which *you knew it was not worth*, and which the purchaser, with *your* knowledge, would not have given. Is this honesty? Is this practical truth? Is this the spirit, or is it capable of being at all reconciled to the spirit of the golden rule? No, my brethren:—the divine principles of Christianity must not be made to bend to the customs of a market,—or to the loose and conventional morality which the buyers and sellers of

this world may, in any case, choose to impose upon themselves. All must be daylight—nothing in the dark—nothing even in the dimness and twilight of dubious principle. The conscience must be kept clear without misgiving. How would you relish the thought, while you were chuckling over your success in getting so good a price for your article,—that the buyer on whom you had succeeded in imposing, should curse you for a swindler, and load your religion with revilings, and blaspheme the blessed name by which you are called?—or, if you have succeeded, as a buyer, in getting from the seller an article far below what you knew to be its real value,—by taking advantage, for example, of his exigency at the time for ready money compelling him to part with it,—that he should post you as a hard iron-hearted extortioner, that took advantage of a man's necessities to drive an iniquitous bargain?

O for more, amongst Christians, of sterling practical consistency! There may be a great deal of talk about sanctification, where, alas! there is sadly little of truly sanctified conduct. Some men seem as if they thought religion consisted in being able to talk well about the gospel mystery of sanctification; and they will go far deeper into it, and make much more mystery of it, than the Bible itself; for *there*, there is no mystery in the subject. But the great matter is—*practical sanctity of life*:—and that, consisting, not in any regular routine of religious exercises, private or public, or even the unwonted multiplication of these; but in “doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God.” It will not do for a man to have prayers morning and evening in his family, while he makes little scruple of dishonesty and dirty trickery in his business through the day. Away with the miserable inconsistency! Better, far better, *no* prayers, than prayers of which the devotion is belied by the conduct. An avowed infidel is a far less mischievous character than such a professor. Let every professing Christian be the same in the market that he is upon his knees; the same in his dealings with men, that he seems to be in his intercourse with God.

LECTURE LXII

PROV. XX. 15—21.

“There is gold, and a multitude of rubies: but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel. Take his garment that is surety for a stranger; and take a pledge of him for a strange woman. Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel. Every purpose is established by counsel; and with good advice make war. He that goeth about as a tale-bearer revealeth secrets; therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips. Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness. An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning, but the end thereof shall not be blessed.”

It is evident that, in the first of these verses, it is intended to bring the two things mentioned into comparison. And the comparison may be considered as designed, first, in regard to *abundance* and *scarcity*. The idea is conveyed, of the one article being in *plenty*, and the other being a *rarity*. “There is gold and a multitude of rubies”—that is, there is no lack of these. “But the lips of knowledge,”—which, of course, presuppose and include the mind enlightened and the heart influenced by the knowledge which the lips impart,—are “a precious jewel.” Some jewels are more common, some more rare; the rarest being the most precious and costly. Now such a jewel—a diamond of the purest water,—“a pearl of great price,”—are “the lips of knowledge,” lips diffusing knowledge from a wise and understanding heart.

The comparison is also designed in regard to the real *intrinsic worth* of the things mentioned,—their sterling value. “Knowledge” is an *attribute of mind*; and even in this view possesses a *nature* more excellent than mere external

property,—of which the veriest fool, who has little if any mind at all, may chance at times to have the largest share. As mind ranks above matter, “knowledge” ranks above wealth; and as of all the descriptions of knowledge which mind can possess, that which has God for its object is, beyond comparison, the most valuable, the lips that communicate it are inestimably precious. They are precious in all seasons, under all circumstances, and in all the relationships of life. And there is a time (as some who now hear me are delightfully and soothingly feeling) when, above all others, “the lips of knowledge” are thus precious—when life itself is closing. The deathbed sayings of dying saints—O what “precious jewels” *these* are! It is not, indeed, on deathbed sayings that our hopes rest of the everlasting well-being of those we love. The nature and circumstances of their departure may be such as not to admit of them; and we look to the surer evidence of the previous consistent life,—the manifestations in it of the sincerity and the power of faith. But still, we desire and delight to have them. What could “gold and the multitude of rubies” do, to soothe the agitated and agonized spirit, in the season of bereavement and sorrow, when “the desire of our eyes has been taken away by God’s stroke?” But how full of comfort—true, rich, sterling comfort—when the afflicted heart can have recourse to the fondly-retentive memory, where, as in a cabinet, these gems of inestimable value are laid up, and take them down, and examine them over and over again, and still with new and growing satisfaction!—Yes, the dying utterances of the “lips of knowledge” are jewels—on which survivors know not how to set a value! And, while peculiarly precious to relatives and friends, they are precious to *all*, as delightful proofs of the *reality* of religion,—of the *divinity* of the gospel,—affording a confirmation to our faith, and a cheering animation to our hope, in anticipating the time of our own final adieu to the present world, with all that endears it to our affections!

Verse 16. “Take his garment that is surety for a stranger; and take a pledge of him for a strange woman.”—The

subject of *suretiship* has already been more than once before us.* The case here supposed is in the first place one of *grievous imprudence*. It is becoming surety for "*a stranger*;" a person of whom the man who "*strikes hands*" knows little or nothing, either as to his *property* or his *character*—whether he has the *means* of relieving the suretiship, or whether he has the *honest intention*;—any new acquaintance, who has accidentally fallen in his way, who chances to please him, and for whose company and conversation and manners he takes a sudden fancy. Any dealings with the man who acts thus involve the greatest risk. This is expressed in the language—"Take his garment that is surety for a stranger." The meaning is, lend such a man nothing without good security—the utmost that can be got, to his very garment. The strong terms are probably intended to convey the advice to have *nothing whatever to do with a man of this description*—to decline *all* dealings with him. This is the more likely, that the *garment* was the very last thing that, under the Jewish law, was allowed to be taken in pledge; and it was not permitted to be kept beyond the passing day.†

It is a case also of infatuated *profligacy*: "And take a pledge of him *for a strange woman*." Two reasons might be assigned for this,—a more general, and a more special:—*first*, because he is a *profligate character*; giving his time and his strength to vicious indulgence, and not, therefore, very likely to be steadily attentive to business, or very mindful of principle in the management of it;—exposed to temptation, to spend on his vices what ought to be reserved for payment of his debts, and not, consequently, safe to be trusted. The less you have to do with him the better. Then, *secondly*, because when a man has become the slave of this particular description of passions,—when he has fallen into the snare of the harlot,—when he has surrendered himself to the fascinations of female blandishment, there is hardly anything so foolish, and hardly anything so base, which the woman in

* Chap. vi. 1, 2; xi. 15; xvii. 18.

† See Exod. xxii. 26, 27.

whose toils he has been taken may not prevail upon him to do. To this, alas! experience, in all ages, and in all nations, bears most ample testimony.

Verse 17. "Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel." This is a very lively and pithy figure to express a very important sentiment. The sentiment is this:—"Property obtained by unjust means, how gratifying soever at the time the acquisition of it may be, will ultimately yield anything but satisfaction." Whence may this be supposed to arise? First, *from conscience*. Success in fraudulent schemes may for the time blind the man's mind who is practising them, from being sufficiently sensible of the evil he is doing. It may inebriate him. It may lay his conscience asleep, and keep it slumbering. Thus for a while he may rejoice in his newly-acquired possessions. But the hurry and eagerness of the pursuit subside; the novelty of acquisition wears off; the man has leisure for reflection. Then conscience begins its work of reproof. It arraigns him secretly, within the privacy of his own bosom, at its bar. It passes sentence on the means by which he has got what is giving him his pleasure; puts a sting into the recollection of them. Thus his present enjoyment is embittered by memory. Memory is for ever summoning him anew before the tribunal of conscience, and reading new articles of indictment against him. Thus all the sweetness is extracted from his enjoyment. His bread is "eaten with bitter herbs;" or, to keep by the figure before us, —"*his mouth is filled with gravel.*" Nothing could be more emphatically expressive of bitter disappointment, than the idea of a hungry man putting into his mouth, with an eager appetite, the bread that should relieve and satisfy his craving, and finding it turn to sand and gravel stones!

A further cause is the *absence of the blessing of God*. God is righteous. He can regard with no complacency possessions which have been thus obtained. He curses them. And the variety is endless, of the ways in which He can make his hidden curse to be felt. He can, as we have been mentioning, make the inward monitor do its duty, and become the

unrighteous man's secret tormentor. He can bring his frauds to light by means that are beyond the culprit's control, and which no efforts of his can possibly counteract; and thus cover him with infamy, and even deprive him of his ill-gotten gains, and bring him to poverty, by taking confidence and credit away from him. Or He can make his successful frauds and his ill-gotten gains the means of tempting him to further speculations, by which all comes to be lost that he had acquired. Or He can render him, to his ruin, the miserable mortified dupe of artifices still deeper than his own. In these and a hundred other ways, He can verify the proverb, and convert the "bread of deceit" into mouthfuls of gravel.*

We shall take in connexion with the sentiment of *this* verse that in the twenty-first, "An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed."—As to this verse, it must be evident, that in the word "*hastily*" more is *implied* than is *expressed*. A man may get an estate, and a large one too, with all the abundance attendant upon it, *by succession*;—may thus come to it at once, yet with perfect integrity on his part. Nay, by sudden events, affecting the state of markets, a man may make a fortune with startling rapidity, and be chargeable with nothing inconsistent with the most conscientious principle. Or the sudden acquisition may be the consequence of some speculation of a perfectly honest and even prudent and altogether justifiable character, with which no one has any fair ground to find fault. But "*hastily*," here, is evidently meant to imply that some improper and unjustifiable means have been employed to *expedite* possession. A man, for instance, may, by violence, remove from the inheritance its present occupant, and thus make way, before the time, for himself; or, by some unrighteous means, he may supplant the immediate successor,—the one who comes between himself and the present occupant. Or, in the prosecution of business, there may be an over-eager "hasting to be rich,"—by oppressing and grinding the poor,—by defrauding the

* Comp. Jer. xvii. 11.

public revenue,—by raising false reports and employing other unfair means to affect the money-market,—the rate of exchange, or the value of particular descriptions of goods and property. “*But in the end, it shall not be blessed.*” The possessor may appear happy; but there are no cases in which it would be more foolish for us to judge according to *appearances*. There may, many a time, be a great amount of secret misery, that is not visible to the eye of man. So much so, that it is very difficult for us to say, *when* a man is really happy in earthly things, and when he is *not*. There is often much of the semblance of happiness assumed in the intercourse of general society that covers a sad reality both of personal and domestic misery. The smile may be upon the lips, when the worm of secret remorse is gnawing at the heart. The face that is all glee in the public assemblies of fashion and gaiety, may be all gloom and fretfulness at the fire-side; and the brow that is serene and unclouded in the parlour, may be depressed with melancholy or knitted with agony in the solitary chamber or the lonely walk.

And above all, there is a sense of the words—“*in the end it shall not be blessed,*” that should make the heart of every unrighteous and selfish “haster to be rich,” “meditate terror.” At the last—in the dying hour, and in that day when “God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing,”—instead of *blessing*, it will bring the distress of remorseful anticipation, and the shame and curse and “everlasting contempt” in which all must end that is contrary to the will of the Just One. It is a simple but affecting statement—“When he dieth he shall carry nothing away.” He may even die in possession; but nothing can he carry one step beyond the confines of life,—nothing save remorse and despair; and these, when all else fails him, shall abide with him *for ever*. Present gain shall be future and eternal loss.

In the former part of the next verse we have a general maxim of practical importance, and in the latter the application of it to a special case:—

1. The *general maxim*:—“Every purpose is established

by counsel." It is a truth, both with regard to *good* counsel and to *evil*: for by good counsel evil purposes may be overturned, and by evil counsel purposes that are good. How often do wicked men consult together for establishing their evil devices, and the more effectually accomplishing their purposes and plans of mischief! So ought *we* to do, in regard to purposes and plans for good. The first inquiry should be, to ascertain fully that it is indeed *good* we are proposing to seek; and then, the better it is, the more solicitous should we be to adopt right and promising *means* for its attainment. This is the proper order, both for *consideration* in our own minds, and *consultation* with others:—first, the goodness of the *end*; then the goodness of the *means*:—and our anxiety for sound and wholesome counsel should be in proportion to the probable nature and magnitude of *consequences* from any projected plan of procedure.

2. We have a *special application* of the general maxim:—"With good advice make war." It must be obvious to you, that this is quite the opposite of an encouragement to a warlike spirit. It assumes, indeed, that war *may* be made; and even that there are cases in which it cannot be avoided. But the evident meaning is, that in no case should it be made rashly and inconsiderately;—but that, on the contrary, the utmost deliberation and the soundest advice are necessary ere it be resorted to. I shall make no attempt to paint war's unnumbered horrors. It has written Aceldama and Golgotha on many a fair and flourishing region of our globe. I will not describe either the battle scene itself, or the battle-field when the battle itself is over,—the phrenzy of the one, or the woe of the other;—the frantic thirst for blood, the eagerness of effort to cleave heads and pierce hearts, and in every way wound and maim and kill, that rages during the conflict;—nor, when the conflict is done, the ghastly and frightful wounds, the maimed and mutilated bodies, the pains and groans and shrieks of the dying, and all the untold horrors of the field of carnage and blood. Such a field I can well believe to be a scene, of which none but those who have actually beheld it can form a conception equal to the

truth. Nor will I pass from that scene to remind you of what some of us can look back upon with a sigh—of the multitudes of bereaved and weeping fathers and mothers, wives and children, brothers and sisters, and relatives of all degrees, which are the necessary consequence of every battle, whether by land or by sea. And when I have mentioned the expenditure of *human life*, I should be ashamed to notice after it, as unworthy of being brought into comparison, the expenditure of the national treasures, and the consequent burdening of the nation's property, and income, and articles of consumption. WAR should be a word, needing only to be named, to fill every heart with indignant abhorrence; it is environed with so many of the very worst realities of misery. Alas! on this very account, that it should, at the same time, be surrounded with so many false glories—so many enticing honours! It requires to be so, to induce any to engage in it. They are dazzled by its honours to tempt them to face its dangers.

I am by no means prepared to go so far as some have gone, by whom war, in every case, and under every form of it, whether *defensive* or *offensive*, is held unjustifiable. I would say, however—

1. None but wars that are strictly *defensive* can, on any principle of humanity or of justice, be vindicated; nor ought they even to be palliated. All wars that are undertaken for conquest,—for the extension of territory,—for the gratification of either kingly or national ambition,—or for any similar purposes, I can regard in no other light than as schemes of wholesale injustice, cruelty, oppression, and murder. All the blood that is shed in them is the blood of murder. It is on the nation's hands, and cries from the ground for vengeance. And those who undertake and prosecute such wars, instead of being complimented with the epithets of greatness, bedizzened with marks of honour, and their names handed down to posterity with the halo of glory around them, should be pilloried to the execrations of all succeeding ages. Such have all the men of mere conquest and ambition been—from Nimrod to Napoleon.

2. Even with regard to *defensive* wars,—wars which we may consider justifiable in their abstract *principle*,—it should be well ascertained, that they really *are* defensive. In my mind, the full extent of justifiable war is this—that *when an attack is made, we be prepared to repel it*. I am more than jealous of all wars that are undertaken on the surmise and suspicion of existing *intentions*,—of problematical possibilities or probabilities of what another nation is projecting and intending against us. This is hazardous ground for creatures to take, who “know not what a day may bring forth.” We may thus, on the ground of mere apprehension, of what may have no existence save in our own minds, attack and wrong an unoffending nation, and waste both their lives and those of our own countrymen on the mere *peradventure*, the mere *mayhap* of our own too jealous sensitiveness. And then, when it really does bear the proper character of *defensive* war,—has everything possible been done, on our part, to shun it?—every practicable expedient tried, and tried in earnest, for preventing matters coming to the extremity? Have all such explanations and concessions been made as by possibility *can* be made? Has every becoming anxiety been shown to maintain or restore a good understanding, and avoid an evil, or rather an accumulation of evils, so dreadful? As I could not justify an individual who should take the life of another, so long as there existed the remotest possibility of effecting his own safety and escape otherwise; so neither could I undertake to vindicate even wars of defence, if proper means, every means at all accessible, had not been used to prevent their necessity; and their necessity, as measured—I am afraid to say by the nation’s honour, for that is so very often nothing more than the nation’s touchy and sensitive *pride*,—but by the nation’s *safety*. Assuredly, in nineteen cases out of twenty, the best advice would be, *not to make war at all*:—and a truly wise and good Government will ever incline to this counsel and to this course. But alas! princes and governments have most generally been of another mind. They have too often stood upon every

punctilio, and rather sought and fomented occasions of quarrel, than done what they could to avoid and to remove them. They have looked for all concession from the one side; and have too frequently excited the very cause that has produced the hostile position, and then converted it into their apology! Would it could be said of our own country, that in these respects, either in times more recent or more remote, she was free of blame! Like Moab, alas! we have been "exceeding proud." And, while this has been a national sin, it has too often also been the sin of our princes. Warlike kings have had, as a matter of course, warlike courtiers. Whenever a monarch has said, "Shall I go up to Ramoth-Gilead to battle? or shall I forbear?"—there have always been enough of Zedekiahs, with their lips of flattery and their symbolical horns of iron, to say, "Go and prosper!" and but few Micaiahs, men of honest and independent principle,—“faithful among the faithless”—to lift the voice of dissuasion. It ought to be “good advice” indeed, well-weighed, and seriously, deliberately taken, when *peace* or *war* is the alternative.

The *spirit* of the verse is of course applicable to all private personal and domestic differences and quarrels. O be men of peace; and be peacemakers. This is the character befitting the followers of the “Prince of peace.” All such should deprecate war, and should do all that lies in their power to diffuse and cherish the spirit of peace. In a nation like ours, where public opinion and feeling have such an amount of imperative influence, this is of special importance. For true indeed is the language of a Christian poet of our own—

“ War is a game, which, were their subjects wise,
Kings should not play at.”

The taste for war is the most dreadful taste for the well-being of the world that can possibly prevail.

Verse 19. “He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets; therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips.” It seems to be the *malignant* talebearer that is, at least especially, meant in this verse. The *first* object is—to *get* secrets. This is the end of the *flattery* in the

second clause of the verse. He “flattereth with his lips” to insinuate himself into the good graces of individuals and families, and to draw out their secrets from them, by working himself into intimate familiarity. And, to further his end, he, directly or indirectly, by sly insinuations or open abuse, as best suits particular cases, gratifies their feeling of dislike to their enemies. Then—having wormed out the wished-for secrets,—to those very enemies he is immediately off, to tell them all, and to pour into *their* ears flattery of themselves, and abuse of those he had just been flattering. He “*goeth about*” from one to another,—from family to family; retails his stories; makes his comments; and leaves his wounds to rankle and inflame in successive bosoms.

Mark the warning—“*Meddle not with him.*” When you find a man disposed to flatter yourselves, and to ridicule and vilify the absent—*suspect him*; beware of him; make no confidential communications to him. He is aiming at some end of his own. The less you have to say to him, or to do with him, the better. The probability is, that in the very next place to which he goes, *you yourself* may be the subject of his ill-natured sarcasms, and the very persons he has to you been reviling, the subjects of his flattery.

Verse 20. “Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness.”* To curse is to imprecate evil on any one. How monstrous the thought! —“cursing father or mother!” the authors of your being! the preservers and nourishers of your infancy and childhood! —the proper guardians of your boyhood and youth! Surely on the lip that utters a curse against his father must come the curse of the Father of all! By the law of Moses the offence was *death*;† and although the provisions of the criminal law of the Jews are not, in all their peculiarities, binding on other peoples,—yet, as given by God, they show us His mind as to the evil to which the punishment was annexed. The divine displeasure is here expressed by a remarkably signifi-

* Chap. xix. 26.

† Exod. xxi. 17: Lev. xx. 9.

cant figure:—"his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness." The figure of a "*lamp*" is sometimes used for a son—who preserves a man's name or memory in the world, keeping it up to successive generations.* If we take the figure in this view of it, the meaning here will be, that the name and memory of such a son as is described shall be extinguished and forgotten,—as unworthy to be remembered. The punishment would thus correspond with the offence. The figure is also used in connexion with *outward prosperity*.† The meaning, in that case, will be—he *shall not prosper*; the curse of God shall rest on him and on his substance, blasting his schemes, frustrating his hopes, and covering him with shame. Perhaps, as *death* was the punishment of the sin by the law,—the "*lamp*" may signify the *lamp of life itself*. God has doomed him to die: and if he repent not, not only shall the lamp of temporal life be quenched, but the lamp of life eternal shall be quenched in the blackness of darkness for ever!

* See 1 Kings xi. 36; xv. 4: Psalm cxxxii. 17.

† Prov. xiii. 9: Job viii. 5, 6.

LECTURE LXIII.

Prov. xx. 22—30.

“Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the Lord, and he shall save thee. Divers weights are an abomination unto the Lord; and a false balance is not good. Man’s goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way? It is a snare to the man who devoureth that which is holy, and after vows to make inquiry. A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them. The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly. Mercy and truth preserve the king; and his throne is upholden by mercy. The glory of young men is their strength; and the beauty of old men is the grey head. The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil; so do stripes the inward part of the belly.”

THE first of these verses is one of those in which there has been imagined a difference,—and indeed one of the chief differences,—between the teaching of the Old Testament and that of the New. You will find very few persons who have not the idea in their minds that, under the ancient economy, the *law of retaliation* was allowed to be acted upon, to some extent, while, under the present, it is expressly repealed, in its principle and in its practice. It is only necessary to compare a few passages in the Old Testament and in the New, to show that this is an entire misapprehension. Look, for example, to Exod. xxiii. 4, 5: Lev. xix. 18: Prov. xvii. 13; xxiv. 29: and Rom. xii. 17—21. It is remarkable, that in this last passage the Apostle both quotes an Old Testament injunction, and enforces it by an Old Testament sentiment or divine assurance.* Surely this

* For the former see Prov. xxv. 21, 22, and for the latter, Deut. xxxii. 35.

should be enough to satisfy us, that our Lord's language on this subject* was not the laying down of a *new law*, but only the *right interpretation of the old*, in opposition to the corrupt glosses of those false teachers among the Jews who perverted the law, as false teachers among professing Christians have perverted the gospel. You must be satisfied, from the passages cited, that "Thou shalt love thy neighbour and *hate thine enemy*," never was the law of Moses. And with regard to the "eye for an eye and the tooth for a tooth," it formed a part of the judicial or criminal law of the land, of which the administration was committed to the magistrate; but it had been perverted into a toleration of private and personal resentment and retaliation. This interpretation, or *misinterpretation*, our Lord disowns; and even the strong terms He employs in doing so are to be understood, I apprehend, as expressing no more than what had *always* been the spirit and proper sense of the divine precepts. The extent to which his words should be interpreted *according to the letter*, is a point into which it is impossible for us to enter. Their *absolutely literal* acceptance is, in my opinion, demonstrably inadmissible. It is enough, to show this, to attend to one only of the commands. The injunction "*give to every man that asketh of thee*," if taken absolutely without restriction, forbids the exercise of all discretion on your part, and leaves you entirely at the discretion of such as may choose to present their demand. Whatever it be, you must grant it, —even to the half or to the whole of your property. If you say, "That is making the thing ridiculous," I grant it;—but it *is* the literal interpretation, and no more: so that, in saying so, you say no more than that that interpretation is ridiculous: for whenever you introduce any qualification or restriction, you give up the principle of literality. You would bind yourselves, by its adoption, not only to incessant acts of *indiscretion*, but to many of *injustice*.

But I am forgetting the verse before us. It is very true that retaliation is *natural*—that, in the terms of the poet,

* Matt. v. 32—45.

"*revenge is sweet.*" And there are philosophers who, because they find it a principle in our nature, vindicate it, and affirm it right. But "they do err, not knowing the Scriptures," and not admitting the character there given of our nature as fallen and depraved. It cannot prove a thing to be right that it is *natural*, when the nature to which it is natural is a corrupt nature. It is true that when one man wrongs another he deserves punishment. But there is divine wisdom in not leaving the right of punishment in the hands of the party injured. There is more than danger, there is next to a certainty, of its being inflicted *in excess*—no man being an impartial judge in his own cause. Excess is, in its turn, injury done. And thus the way is laid open to unceasing retaliation and interminable hostilities.

We are very readily tempted to think, that if we take injuries without retaliation, it will only encourage our enemy himself, or others, to repeat the wrong, and to use us the worse. And it is not to be denied that *malignity* has, at times, taken this advantage of unresenting meekness. If, in our experience, it were in any case to turn out so, we should suffer in the very best company,—in company with our Lord and Master himself. But, generally speaking, it is otherwise. A peaceful spirit is the safest spirit, and the spirit which is most likely to meet with a peaceful return,—disarming hostility, and softening resentment. The terms before quoted show this.* They are founded on the very principle of this tendency. At all events, our sole inquiry in all cases ought simply to be, "What saith the Scripture?"—What is *God's will*? That it is our duty to do, leaving the result with Him. Such is the spirit of the verse under review. And it is in harmony with other parts of the divine word.† All suffering is for "righteousness' sake," that is produced by our conscientious adherence to the rightly interpreted injunctions of divine authority.

We have had the subject of next verse frequently before us, and dwell not upon it: only let it be kept steadily in

* Rom. xii. 21. † Psal. xxxvii. 5—8, 34: 1 Pet. iv. 19; iii. 13, 14.

view, and exert its intended influence:—"Divers weights are an abomination unto the Lord; and a false balance is not good."

Verse 24. "Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?" It is a truth, that God prescribes the *path of duty*; and a truth, connected with this, and arising out of it, that in order to our "understanding the way" in which we ought to go, we should *consult God*: consult Him in *conscience*, and in His *word*—the former being the natural intimation of His will,—the second the revealed; and consult Him also under the sought guidance of the Holy Spirit, as through the corruption of the heart, we are in danger of perverting the lessons both of nature and of revelation, and need the accompanying influences of that Spirit, to deliver us from all prejudice and prepossession, from every blinding and perverting passion and tendency.

But true as this is, it does not appear to be the truth intended here. The reference is, apparently, not to the *moral will* of God, but to his *superintending providence*. The idea in the former clause of the verse is, that in a man's course through life, every step is under divine control; everything ordered by a supreme will,—a will to which all things in existence, every power and influence in creation,—are entirely subordinate and subservient*—the will of the Infinite.

And hence the import of the question, "How can a man understand his own way?" seems to be—how can he form and carry forward his plans, with any assurance of success, or of things turning out in accordance with his wishes and designs? He *cannot*. Shortsighted and ever dependent, he is incapable of laying out his route through life with any degree whatever of confidence, so numberless and diversified are the circumstances by the operation of which his course may be intercepted, and the necessity of a change imposed. Who has not experienced this? Before we have advanced a few steps in the direction and for the destination we have fixed for our-

* See Dan. iv. 35,

selves, something or other occurs that arrests us, and obliges us to desist entirely from our purpose, or to alter and modify it, however reluctantly, to something widely different! We discover that "our goings are of the Lord," and that we cannot "understand our own way." And if not *our own*, how much less His! O how often are we made to feel the truth of the words—"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts!" Isa. lv. 8, 9. The latter part of this assurance He will, in the end, make apparent, to the admiring astonishment of His believing people. Yet, brethren, with the full conviction of this in our judgments, O how very hard is it to bring our hearts to any thing like cheerful acquiescence in some of the divine appointments by which our will has been thwarted! If we can get even so far as to say, "Thy will be done!" it is still with the sigh of a heavily-burdened spirit, and with the tear lingering in our eye. We "walk in darkness and have no light." We wonder *why* the Lord thus hedges up *our own* way, and appoints us another of *His*,—not at all to our mind. And when there is this difference between our way and God's, and a difficulty in seeing what is wrong in ours,—it is a strong trial of faith. But faith *must* have the victory. Wait but for a short while, and all will be plain. Had we the eyes of God, we should, in every case without exception, and without the hesitation of a moment, choose God's way.

The "ways" of the wicked are abomination to the Lord; yet they too are under control. They retain all their freedom, and all their guilt; but in ten thousand modes, their baffled plans are made to forward His. Their every word and act He can render subservient to His honour; and often turns their shame to glory, while they are turning His glory to shame.

Verse 25. "It is a snare to the man who devoureth that which is holy, and after vows to make inquiry." Under the Mosaic dispensation, there were various articles which, by the prescriptions of the law, were consecrated to God, or holy.

Such were the *titnes*, the *first-fruits*, the *firstlings* of the herd and of the flock. There was thus always a temptation to selfishness to appropriate a part of these to its own use. There were, at the same time, things voluntarily devoted—set apart to Jehovah as free-will offerings. It is to *these* more especially, in all probability, that Solomon here refers. To “*devour that which was holy*,” was to make a meal for themselves of that which they had vowed to God,—vowed as an offering for His worship:—and the phrase clearly, in the principle and spirit of it, applies to the appropriation to themselves, in any way, of aught whatever that had thus been consecrated.* What, then, is meant by “*after vows making inquiry?*” Evidently, making inquiry how a vow may be eluded;—how, with anything like a clear conscience, the fulfilment of it may be shunned, and the consecrated thing withdrawn from God, and appropriated to self. A man, for example, might make a vow when in trouble and straits. He might then devote something of his substance solemnly to God on condition of his recovery. He does recover. But with the cessation of his trouble, his religious impressions, which were the result only of temporary fear, cease too. He calls to mind his vow. He frets at himself for having made it; and he sets himself to find or to frame pretexts for not regarding it as obligatory,—for shaking himself free of it. That this is the kind of inquiry that is intended in the verse, is sufficiently evident from the parallelism of the one part of it with the other. It is clear, that the “*snare*” in the former part of the verse means the temptation, in order to “devouring that which is holy,” to “make inquiry” after pretexts for getting rid of the vow by which it was *made* holy.

The words have frequently been most strangely and mischievously perverted. They have been made to mean, that, when a man had once vowed, whether the vow was right or wrong, or whatever might be his subsequent conscientious convictions concerning it, he must abide by it;—that in every case of vow, it was wrong even to think of “making

* Comp. Mal. iii. 8—10

inquiry" as to the rectitude of what had been vowed. For example, it used to be applied (happily, in the progress of free and enlightened thought, such application will not often be found now,) to what were termed *ordination vows*. By taking these, a man was understood as binding himself to maintain the same sentiments to the end of his life; and if he ever gave expression to any views inconsistent with those he had vowed solemnly to maintain and defend, he was charged with the sin of "after vows making inquiry!"—This, you will admit, was indeed "*a snare*,"—a snare to the conscience,—a snare to the soul. To take any such vow would be to bind one's self to one or other of two things, of which it is not easy to say, they are both so bad, which is the worse;—either, first, to the cessation of all further inquiry after truth on the point which has been the subject of the vow,—which is neither more nor less than asserting, on that point, the claim to infallibility; or secondly, to *hypocrisy* and *simulation*, by the continued profession of the same thing, whatever change might actually have taken place in one's opinions and belief. Such an understanding of the words is in opposition to the duty, incumbent on every man, of constant investigation, and of constant openness to conviction, freedom from prejudice, and readiness to relinquish error when shown to be error, and embrace truth when shown to be truth. Many a conscience has been snared, and snared long, in this way. It is well, when the snare is broken, and the conscience escapes. *Vows* are solemn promises or engagements, come under to God, generally accompanied with an oath or imprecation, formally expressed or tacitly understood, of some service to be performed, or some sacrifice to be offered, or some portion of worldly goods to be devoted to God, for religious purposes. Such vows it was duty to fulfil. "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools; pay that which thou hast vowed," Eccl. v. 4. The vow of a fool (like the *sacrifice* of the fool in the first verse) was a vow made *without the heart*—without intention and resolution to pay it. God "has no pleasure in *such* fools"—fools who think to impose

upon Him by false promises, and insult Him with hypocritical mockery. What is vowed must be paid:—"Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay," (verse 5.) The reason of this is plain. The vow was *not required*: it was spontaneous: so that there was no sin in *not* making it; but there *was* sin in *making* and *not paying* it.

The phrase, then, "after vows to make inquiry," is condemnatory of *two* evils. It condemns vowing *rashly*, without due previous consideration or inquiry. To make inquiry *after* a vow is *not* to make inquiry *before* it. It is clear that the proper place for inquiry is *before* the taking of the vow. It should *precede*, not *follow*. A man should examine his ground; think what he is doing; act with due deliberation. It further condemns what has already been mentioned—inquiring, after the vow has been made, how it may be evaded; and that, not from any conviction of the evil of the thing vowed, but merely from a selfish unwillingness to fulfil it.—It is obvious, at the same time, that no vow, how solemnly soever taken, can ever render that morally right which is morally wrong;—can ever, that is, set aside the obligation of the divine law. That is an authority which must ever stand above the obligation of any vow. The *first* inquiry should have reference to *this*. If a man finds that he has vowed to do what the law of God forbids,—his guilt has lain in *taking* such a vow; but it never can be his duty to keep it. His promise to *do wrong*, can never cancel his previous obligation *not* to do it.

It is questionable, whether vows, properly so called, are consistent with the genius of the New Testament dispensation. At any rate, of such vows as were common under the Old, we have no recorded examples under the New. *Resolutions* to serve God we *may*, nay we *must* make; there is no getting on in the divine life and in the zealous promotion of the divine glory, without them. But the binding of the soul by particular bonds and oaths, whether verbal or written,—obligations superinduced upon those of the divine law,—have been "a snare" to many. Weak minds have often felt the

obligation of their vow more stringent than that of the divine authority. We do, it is true, find Paul vowing; but his vow belonged not to the Christian dispensation, but to the Jewish, which had not finally “vanished away,” and to which he continued for the time to conform. All the vows of celibacy, of pilgrimages, of pious gifts; all the vows supposed to be taken at baptism and the Lord’s supper according to the superstitious notions attached by many to these ordinances; all vows of personal, and national, and ecclesiastical covenanting; and all vows at ministerial ordination, (and it may be worth the while of some of our total-abstainers to consider, whether vows of abstinence, *when taken under any pledge or form of a religious character*, may not also be included,) appear to be alike destitute of New Testament warrant. But still, we have here the great general lesson of FIDELITY TO GOD.

Verse 26. “A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them.” There is here an allusion to the different modes of separating the grain from the husk or hull; by one or more of which the straw was at the same time cut.* The different methods were—the *flail*, the *drag*, the *wain*, the *treading of oxen*. It is to the *third*, that the allusion is here made. The wheel was armed with teeth by means of which the cutting of the straw was effected at the same time with the separation of the grain. The idea intended by the figure seems to be that of *severity of punishment*,—and the separation of the wicked from society. Not, by any means, that excessive and indiscriminate severity of punishment is the most effective system for the prevention and suppression of crime. A wise king, acting on the principles of human nature, and the lessons of experience, will rather adopt the system of a well-adjusted graduation in the scale of punishments; according to which they are, on the principle of comparative lenity, proportioned to the nature and aggravations of various crimes, and *regularly executed*,—in preference to that which professes to hold the terrors of death

* See Isa. xxviii. 28.

over many crimes, but without the intention of uniform execution. The former system has been found the most effectual; and it is evidently the most accordant with all right principle and right feeling. There has happily been, of late years, a great and salutary mitigation in the sanguinary character of the criminal law of our own country. The consequence of that sanguinary character naturally was, that from unwillingness to prosecute, the unwillingness of witnesses to give unfavourable evidence, the unwillingness of juries to find a verdict of guilty, and the unwillingness of judges to condemn, and of the prince to allow the law to take its course, multitudes never came to trial; and of those who were tried many escaped conviction; and of such as were sentenced to die not one in twenty came to execution. All this encouraged rather than repressed crime, by inspiring the hope of impunity, the expectations of most men being naturally sanguine and flattering in their own case.—The subject, however, is too extensive for general discussion.

Let us only remember, that the duty of the king implies a corresponding duty on our part to give the government of the country all the countenance and support in our power in effecting the suppression of “wickedness,” by all legal and constitutional means;—and still more, by all religious and moral means so to diffuse the influence of right principles as to lessen the task of government in the application of penal statutes;—to prevent the *punishment* of wickedness by preventing the *practice* of it.

Verse 27. “The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly.”—When God at first “made man of the dust of the earth,” what would his corporeal structure have been, how admirably soever framed together, in all its beautiful proportions and intricate complexity, had not the breath of life been breathed into it, and had it not been associated with the dominion of *mind*! When man “became a living soul,” there was more imparted to him than mere animal life,—even a rational thinking SPIRIT, conscious of its own existence, and exerting powers which made its existence apparent to others. “The

spirit of man," means his *understanding, reason, conscience*; and is here designated "*the candle of the Lord*"—the *lamp of Jehovah*. God has lighted it in the human breast. It is His gift. He it is who, in this respect, has made us to differ from the animals of the inferior creation that are placed under our subjection. He hath made us "wiser than the beasts of the field, and hath given us more understanding than the fowls of the air." Of this lamp the use is here said to be—to "search all the inward parts of the belly."

We have formerly had occasion to notice that "*the belly*" is used to signify the *invisible interior* of man, and thus comprehends his *whole mental constitution*. We are so accustomed to the use of other parts of the animal frame for particular departments of the operations of mind, that we use the language often with hardly a thought of what is material. Thus we speak of the *heart*, when we mean the affections; of the *bowels*, when we mean the emotions of compassion or tenderness; of the *spleen*, when we mean capricious ill-nature. It is on a similar principle that, in a more general way, the Hebrews used "*the belly*" for *all within*:—and "searching the inward parts of the belly" means simply searching the whole *inner man*. It examines narrowly all our inward principles, desires, and affections,—the motives by which we are influenced, our reflections on the past, our purposes and resolutions for the future. In the original constitution of our nature—in its "first estate,"—in the purity in which it came from the Creator's forming hand, there was nothing to be discovered by all this "searching" but *good*. All was rectitude, loveliness, beauty, moral symmetry and perfection. Now alas! it is far otherwise. It is only when "the lamp" is not used, or used with unfaithful and superficial carelessness, that evil remains undetected. The more closely we carry the light into the hidden chambers of the heart, the greater will be the variety and amount we shall discover of what ought not to be there. It is an extraordinary conception which some persons have had of self-examination, when they have looked upon it with jealousy and dread, and been apprehensive of its exercise in themselves, and of urging it upon

others, as only calculated to encourage self-righteousness. One cannot but suspect that they who think thus must themselves be the subjects of no small portion of the spirit of self-righteousness, when they fancy, that by too closely scrutinizing their hearts and lives, they would find only what was fitted to cherish it! Surely every converted man must be sensible, that the more faithfully he uses the "lamp of the Lord" in "searching his inward parts," the deeper will become his self-abasement. The more he will know of himself:—and if the more he knows of himself, *the more he thinks of himself*—that is, if his self-examination puff him up with self-righteous pride, we may be sure the process has been conducted on a wrong principle. With every genuine child of God the exercise will only serve to—

"Lay him low, and keep him there."

It is too true, that the dictates of conscience, like the operations of all the other powers and faculties of the mind, have become perverted by sin. Its decisions are influenced by corrupt inclinations and passions. It is thus too often a bribed witness, giving false testimony; a corrupted judge, pronouncing partial and erroneous decisions and verdicts. Yet, in such cases, the decisions are frequently not those of conscience at all. There is many a time, at the very moment when they are given, a secret consciousness of their being wrong:—so that as regards the *real* dictates of the inward monitor there is probably a more general harmony among the various tribes and classes of mankind, than at first glance might appear.

It is of immense consequence, that we keep this "lamp" of reason and conscience duly trimmed, and burning clearly;—and that we be duly faithful in the use of it; for what is the worth of a light if it be not applied to use, for the ends it is designed to answer? We should be ever using it; carrying it into the most secret recesses of our souls, detecting and rectifying all that is wrong,—cleaning out every corner of defilement,—keeping all in due order. It is thus that, like

Paul, we should "exercise ourselves to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men."

The ungodly follow the very opposite course. They do all in their power to *dim* the lamp. Trimming and supplying it with oil, is one of the last things they ever think of. If it *will* burn, they try to "put it under a bushel." They do not like to be disturbed by it. What says our Lord?—he who "knew what was in man?"—"Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." And this holds true with regard to *every* light,—with regard to "*whatsoever doth make manifest*," which is the apostle's definition of light. It is equally true of the light of conscience, and of the light of revelation.

Verse 28. "Mercy and truth preserve the king; and his throne is upholden by mercy." This of course is to be understood as expressing what *ought to be*. It is the character of the *good* prince. Well had it been for the world, had the description been true of all rulers,—how different had been the character of the history of nations!—The union of *mercy* and *truth* is perfect in the government of God;—and in the mediatorial government of the Lord Jesus Christ.* The union of both is necessary. *Mercy without truth*, or faithful principle, would be indiscriminating lenity—a pernicious facility of disposition; and *truth without mercy*,—the stern and rigid exercise of justice untempered by clemency,—would be unlovely and repulsive, and as injurious in the one extreme as the former in the other. It has been said, "A *God* all mercy, is a *God* unjust." The same is, in its measure, true, of all inferior rulers. "A *king* all mercy, is a *king* unjust."

The verse before us may be compared with chap. xvi. 12. "It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness." The sentiment of each is alike true. No throne can stand firmly that is not based alike on "*righteousness*" and "*mercy*." The mercy

* Psa. lxxxv. 10.

must be righteous mercy; the righteousness, merciful righteousness:—justice must be attempered by clemency; clemency must be restrained by justice. Every prince who desires to have the character of a Father of his people, must be merciful. What would a father be without mercy? But, at the same time, a father requires to be firm and impartial. Parental authority, that yields to every impulse of feeling, and is incapable of steadfast and determined discipline, is as injurious as the other. The throne of a tyrant may be maintained in temporary stability by the force of terror, by the dread of civil or military execution. He may surround his throne with the myrmidons of his power. He may prolong his reign by fear. But after all, his is power that hangs upon a breath. All tremble to give expression to the feeling which yet universally prevails—the feeling of discontent—of alienation—of rebellion:—but a word once uttered is responded to from every corner of the land; the spell is broken; every eye flashes the long-suppressed resentment; every lip quivers in giving vent to the pent-up murmurings; man, woman, and child, are on the alert; hands are joined; conspiracies are formed; weapons are brandished; the tyrant is hurled from his throne. O! how different when the throne has its foundation in the affections of its happy subjects! *That* is its best and surest establishment. When the prince is true to his word; redeeming his pledges; fulfilling his engagements; and “doing nothing by partiality;”—when, instead of regarding and treating with lightness and neglect the sufferings of his subjects, when evil times come over them, he discovers the spirit of sympathy, and does what lies in his power for their help; promoting such measures as have a tendency to relieve them, and to restore them to independence and comfort, to peace, and plenty.

Verse 29. “The glory of young men is their strength; and the beauty of old men is the grey head.” Each of the clauses of this verse requires to be taken with a qualification. On either side, “the glory may be turned into shame.” The vigour of youth may be prostituted; it may be expended in oppression, intimidation, and violence, in vice and licen-

tiousness, in cruelty, and crime. O! it is sad indeed when the energies of body and mind are thus perverted and abused, instead of being consecrated to God and to virtue! And, if possible, sadder is the melancholy spectacle still, of old age, with its crown of grey hairs, cleaving fast to the world, and spending the feeble remnants of its declining strength in the service of sinful pleasure.—Ah! *then*, there is neither glory in the vigour of youth, nor beauty in the hoary head. All depends on association. Young men may glory in their strength;—they may emulate each other in feats of physical power, and exult in the prize of successful competition:—but when moral and spiritual glory is wanting, of what worth is mere muscle—mere brute force? If that strength is given to vice, it becomes, not the youth's honour, but his disgrace, in the eyes of all the truly wise.—And old men may glory in their age. When they come to surpass by many years those who set out with them in the journey of life; when “by reason of” constitutional “strength,” they have reached the “fourscore years,” or gone considerably beyond even this ultimate limit,—they are apt to be vain of it; to repeat it often; to dwell upon it as their distinction: but here too, the glory is no glory, unless there be corresponding character,—unless there be growing meetness for that eternal world to the verge of which the old man has come. Instead of attractive beauty and loveliness, there are few things more affectingly and distressingly repulsive than dissolute and irreligious old age. We do naturally admire the comeliness, and the manly port, and the muscular energy, and the well-proportioned symmetry, of the youthful form; and we do naturally look with affectionate veneration on the whitening locks of reverend age. But our sentiments and feelings entirely change, and experience a painful revulsion, when we learn that the youth whose external appearance has charmed our eye, is unnatural to his parents and licentiously dissolute,—and that the old man whose grey hairs drew our reverential love has only ceased to be practically dissolute from the cessation of power—that his heart is as estranged as ever from all that is good, that

the hoary head is not in the way of righteousness, and that he is dying as he lived, in infidel unsubmissiveness to God.

Let us see to it, my friends, that we consecrate to HIM the peculiar glories of our frame in the successive periods of life;—that we inscribe “holiness unto the Lord” on the strength of youth, and on the experience and the influence of age. It is indeed lovely to see the full energies of youth early consecrated to God, and put forth in His service; that service faithfully maintained through a long life; and then that life, when venerable in the hoariness of years, closing with the words of the old and devout Simeon—“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation;”—while that Lord pronounces the approving welcome—“Well done, good and faithful servant!” and bestows the final and full reward. O my beloved *young* friends, seek ye, with your whole hearts, this glory of youth, this beauty and reverence of age.

Verse 30. “The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil; so do stripes the inward parts of the belly.” It is not easy to attach a definite meaning to these words. Suppose, with some, the *blueness* of a wound to be a symptom of its *healing*—what comparison can there be between a mere *symptom* or *indication of healing* and the *severity of chastisement or discipline*? Suppose, with others, the *blueness* or *lividness* of the wound to be the effect or mark of its severity; then, properly speaking, there can hardly be a comparison between the effects, whatever they are conceived to be, of severe wounds and severe stripes, they are so nearly one and the same thing. I know not indeed how the original word came to be rendered “*blueness*.” The one word as well as the other is given in lexicons as signifying, among other meanings, *a wound*. But “*the wounds of a wound*” would of course be inadmissible. The following translation has been given by one critic of eminence—“The bruises, or contusions, of a blow are a cleanser to the wicked man; and stripes cleanse the inward parts of the belly.” But this is liable to the same objection with the last mentioned view; namely, that the two things in the comparison are too nearly

the same:—for what difference is there between the contusions of a blow cleansing the wicked, and “stripes cleansing the inward parts of the belly?” The idea in either case is almost if not altogether *identical*. It is not often that I propose alterations on our own translation. I am far from approving of the freedom and frequency with which some alter renderings;—oftener for the worse than for the better.* In the present instance, however, I venture to suggest the following, as probably giving the true spirit of the comparison:—“Surely the *compressions* of a wound cleanse away evil; and so do stripes the inward parts of the belly.” This is in harmony with the radical meaning of the term; being, etymologically, from the verb which denotes to *join* or *couple together*; and at the same time it yields an appropriate sense. The compressions of a wound are necessary for cleansing out of it the purulent and peccant humour, which would prevent its healing;—they are, at the same time, in many cases, exceedingly painful, and would only be endured or inflicted from necessity. And as they thus cleanse the wound, and promote its healing, so in a *moral* sense, does the severity of discipline affect with salutary and cleansing influence, the condition of the inner man. This is the very design of the rod,—the parental rod: “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.” And it is the gracious design of all God’s corrections. He never uses the rod,—never inflicts any stroke of discipline,—not a single stripe,—save for the kind purpose of benefiting the soul,—of repressing evil and confirming and augmenting good. The design of *all* His afflictive visitations is “TO TAKE AWAY SIN.”

* Stuart renders, “Wounding stripes are the remedy of the base, and stripes of the inner part of the body;” and explains—“The bad man’s remedial applications are stripes over the whole person, so severe that they penetrate deep into the body.” Here any thing like antithesis is gone, and the two clauses of the verse are counterparts of each other.

LECTURE LXIV.

—◆—
PROV. XXI. 1—8.

“The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will. Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the Lord pondereth the hearts. To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin. The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want. The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death. The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them; because they refuse to do judgment. The way of man is froward and strange: but as for the pure, his work is right.”

IN the first of these verses some suppose there is an allusion to a gardener, directing the rills of water through the different parts of his grounds; and that a comparison is intended between the ease with which the gardener does this, and the ease and certainty with which God superintends human volitions and purposes, so as to make all subservient to the attainment of His own ends. But the comparison appears, in both its parts, to relate directly to God. The king’s heart is represented as “in the *hand*”—that is, in the *power*, and *under the control*—of Jehovah, as completely as are “the rivers of water.”* And so are *all* “hearts”—all the purposes and determinations of men. This, I repeat, is one of those truths to which we are, *a priori*, constrained to assent. Whatever may be the difficulties with which, in some respects, the subject is environed, we perceive, with

* Comp. chap. xvi. 1, 9; xx. 24.

a kind of intuition, and admit without an instant's hesitation, that *it must be so*. The certainty of the divine counsels requires it. The regular administration of the government of the world requires it. Every view we can take of the divine glory requires it. Never can it be that the will of man should frustrate the will of God—the thoughts of the creature cross and interfere with those of the Creator. Human counsels may thwart human counsels; but it is the divine prerogative, amidst all the incessantly changing and conflicting volitions and actions of the millions of the world's population, to say—"My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

And while of *this* we affirm that it must be so, there is another thing of which, with equal confidence, we affirm the same,—namely, that men, in their volitions and actions, *must be free*, and, as free, must be *accountable*; the freedom being necessary to the accountableness. That men are invariably influenced by *motives*, no more affects the reality of their freedom, than God's having reasons for every step of His procedure affects *His*. Every man is conscious of willing and acting freely. *Both* the portions must be alike true, whether *we* be able clearly to explain the principle of harmony between them, or not. Yet the principle, to a certain extent, is sufficiently intelligible. A man of uncommon penetration,—supposing him to know the peculiarities of any character, the circumstances in which its possessor is placed, and the manner in which the circumstances are calculated to affect his characteristic peculiarities,—would be able to say, with a proportional degree of confidence, how he would act, what course he would pursue, when under the influence of the given circumstances. Yet his knowledge and penetration would not, in the remotest degree, affect the freedom of him whose conduct he predicted. We have only to imagine this acquaintance with circumstances, with characters, and with the influence of the one upon the other, extended to infinitude and infallibility, and we have some notion of the way in which, by the control of *circumstances*, God can control *volitions*; and that, without at all interfering with

liberty and accountableness. This, however, is still, and can never cease to be, one of "the deep things of God."

"The Lord reigneth," says the Psalmist, "let the earth rejoice!" We have cause for joy in the assurance here given us, that those members of our race, who, from their eminence and power, exert the greatest amount of influence over the condition of the world, are, as completely as the meanest, under the superintendence and control of the Supreme; so that even "kings," be the extent of their dominion and the absoluteness of their power what it may, can never go beyond His permission. Let the conviction of this great truth, in all its comprehensiveness, preserve our minds from the agitating fears and apprehensions which might arise from the plans and avowed purposes of the monarchs of the earth,—as affecting the interests of our country, of the church, and of the world. All will be overruled for ends in harmony with divine wisdom and mercy. "HAVE FAITH IN GOD."

Verse 2. "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes; but the Lord pondereth the hearts." There may be a connexion between this and the former verse. It is not by the *actual results* of human actions,—results which God, by his overruling providence, may be pleased to bring out of them,—but by their *principles* and *motives* in the doing of them, that the agents will be tried. *This* will be the test; and it will ever be a most satisfactory, though deeply mysterious exemplification of the truth, that it was by an act the most heinous in the entire annals of mankind, that the redemption of the world was effected. The design of the proverb is,—that men, remembering this, may be jealous of themselves, and not take the rectitude of their way too easily for granted,—but examine their hearts,—search their motives, as in God's sight and in prospect of that day when "He will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing." A man's *WAY* is right in the eye of God just in proportion as his *HEART* is right.

Verse 3. "To do justice and judgment is more acceptable

* See chap. xvi. 2.

to the Lord than sacrifice." This is a most important sentiment, and one frequently to be found in the Old Testament. Look at a few examples:—1 Sam. xv. 22; Isa. i. 11—15; lxvi. 3, 4; Jer. vii. 21—23; Hos. vi. 6; Mic. vi. 6—8. Such passages are in full harmony with the sentiment so distinctly sanctioned by the approbation of Christ, "There is one God, and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices," Mark xii. 33. It would be an obvious misunderstanding and abuse of such expressions, were they to be interpreted as *setting aside sacrifice* under the former dispensation, or even *making light of it*, as a thing about which Jehovah was indifferent, and which He could allow to be neglected with impunity. The sacrifices were of divine institution. The cases were specified in which they were required to be offered; and all their varieties were prescribed. It was duty, therefore, scrupulously to adhere to divine injunction. The language is comparative. There was a danger among the Jewish people of being satisfied with a strict and punctilious performance of every part of the outward ceremonial of worship, and of making a kind of compromise in this way for the neglect of moral duties, or the practice of what was morally wrong. This propensity, which existed all along, evinced itself in its full strength in our blessed Lord's time; and He sets the *principle* of the thing in its obviously correct position, in reprimanding those by whom it was most culpably exemplified,—“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone,” Matt. xxiii. 23. “Judgment, mercy, and fidelity” were the “weightier matters of the law.” They were, therefore, to be *first* regarded. Nothing could set them aside; nothing be a compensation for their omission. Might the others, then, be *disregarded*? By no means:—not even the smallest of them,—the tithing

of garden herbs. Are Christ's words words of contempt and ridicule at their attending to matters of such indifference,—things that might be done or not done at their pleasure? No verily. These things, though not *first*, had yet their own place; and no one could be too rigidly scrupulous in attending to them, however minute, as parts of the divine will. The fault of those reproved lay, not in their doing these, but in their neglecting to do the more important and necessary:—"These *ought* ye to have done, and *not to leave the other undone*."

My brethren, the danger is not at an end. There might be a larger amount of it under an economy which was so characteristically one of external and typical rites; and less under a dispensation of which the leading character, contrasting it with the former, is its *spirituality*. But still there are outward observances in religion,—all the externalities of divine institutions and worship. Let us, then, be upon our guard. Let us not forget the primary necessity, if we would maintain a course well-pleasing to God, of the *moral virtues*. All that is said of their superiority in His sight to "*sacrifice*," is equally true of *whatever is external*. To the heart and the life He still looks:—and the professing Christian who trusts in his baptism,—in his punctual presence in the house of God,—in his regular attendance on the table of the Lord,—is as far wrong in *principle*, as the Jew was, who trusted in his burnt-offerings and sacrifices, his ceremonial cleansings, his tithes and fastings,—while the paramount obligations of practical godliness *were* neglected by the one and *are* neglected by the other. They are in the same condemnation. "Sacrifices" of old were instituted for special purposes. They were arbitrary, ceremonial, typical, temporary; but "justice and judgment" belonged to the eternal rule of right. They had their origin and prototype in the moral nature of God. They were immutable in their obligation, "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." "Sacrifices" were instituted for a single people; "justice and judgment" belong to mankind, and are alike obligatory on the whole race, in every nation under heaven. "Sacrifices" derived

all their value from that which they prefigured, and from the worshipper's state of heart in presenting them,—from what they signified in themselves and what they indicated in the offerer;—"justice and judgment" have, in their own nature, an intrinsic excellence, and, forming part of the image of God, are the objects of His direct complacency and delight. The law of "sacrifice" was set aside when the system to which it belonged, "decayed, waxed old, and vanished away;" but the law of "justice and judgment" is not by the gospel "made void but established." The very end of Christ's mediatorial work was to vindicate eternal righteousness—the righteousness of the divine character—in the extension of mercy to man; and at the same time to give glory and stability to that law which is "holy, and just, and good," and furnish new and mightily constraining motives of obedience to all its precepts.

There is ONE SACRIFICE, my hearers, on which the God of the Bible teaches, invites, encourages, commands you to rest your hopes of pardon and acceptance with Him,—THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST;—the all-atoning blood of the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." In this is your only security; and it is an equal security for ALL. God's first commandment to you, *as sinners*, is to renounce self, and to *trust there*,—in that ONE OFFERING from their reference to which all previous offerings derived their wisdom and their worth;—and then, your "doing justice and judgment" must be the proof of your interest in that one offering, and of your heart having been turned to God by the faith of it.*

"Verse 4. "An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin."—The *first* of these is the natural expression or indication of the *second*; the "high look," or, as on the margin and in the Hebrew, "haughtiness of eyes," the effect and expression of the "proud heart." With regard to these there is no difficulty. That pride, and all the expressions and indications of pride, are hateful to God, is a sentiment often repeated.† But how comes in

* Rom. viii. 1.

† See chap. vi, 16, 17, &c.

"*the plowing of the wicked*" in this connexion?—I would answer, that even retaining the translation, it is not incapable of an appropriate sense. The ordinary occupations of the wicked are gone about and pursued with "a high look and a proud heart;" not with the lowly spirit of dependence and prayer, but with the spirit of independent self-sufficiency and prayerless haughtiness. The things done, how good and useful soever in themselves, may be vitiated by the *spirit* in which they are done. Right in themselves, they may be wrong in their *principle*. And this view of the case might be connected with the previous verse. "The wicked" may bring his "*sacrifice*;" but if he brings it with "a high look and a proud heart,"—nothing can be more unacceptable in the eyes of that God to whom he offers it. Thus both his religious and his ordinary acts are marred by his state of mind. There is "*sin*" in them all. The sentiment has an apt illustration in the case of *Cain*. He was "a tiller of the ground." He brought his offering to God: but it was not the offering of a sinner; it was not the type of atonement. The absence of this arose from his not being humbled before God as a sinner should be. And what he did bring, he brought with a "high look and a proud heart." Thus "the plowing" of this first "tiller of the ground" was "*sin*," and his *offering* too. So, on the same account, is that of every wicked man.

You will observe, however, that the rendering on the margin is—"the *light* of the wicked." Now the marginal renderings have precisely the same authority with those in the text: and they are, not unfrequently, much to be preferred. I am satisfied this is the case in the present instance. The word for a *light* or *lamp*, and the word for a *plough* and *ploughing*, are, in the original, *like* each other; but I am not aware of any instance in which the word, when it signifies *ploughing*, occurs in precisely the same form as here. Moreover, in the Septuagint Greek, the Latin Vulgate, and the Genevese French,* it is, in this occurrence, rendered as in

* Also in the German of Luther.

our English margin; and the rendering has the sanction of most eminent critics and commentators. A *light*, or *lamp*, is often put as the symbol of *prosperity*. The verse is remarkably laconic—"Loftiness of eyes, pride of heart, the light of the wicked, sin." The meaning seems to be, that in the *prosperity* of the wicked,—his light, his joy,—“there is sin.” There is sin in it, because there is *self* in it—no humble recognition of God. He has himself kindled his own “lamp;” has himself supplied the oil to it; has himself trimmed it; has himself sheltered it; has himself kept it burning. All is self. He walks in its light, and exults in it, with “a high look and a proud heart.” The higher he rises in prosperity, the more are “his eyelids lifted up.” The clearer the light of his “lamp,” the more self-sufficient is his vanity, and the more entirely forgetful is he of God. Thus there is “*sin*” pervading and characterizing all, and rendering all unacceptable in the sight of Him who PONDERETH THE HEART.

Verse 5. “The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want.” How is the “*hasty*” man distinguished from the “*diligent*” man? Is not *promptitude in action* a necessary associate of diligence? The answer is, that the “*hasty*” man does not mean the *prompt* and *ready* man, but the *rash* and *fickle* man—the *inconsiderate* and *changeable* man,—the man who acts without *forethought*, and stops without *afterthought*. Observe, then—

1. Diligence, while it is opposed to laziness, is opposed also to *rashness*—to premature and inconsiderate haste. The diligent man first *plans*, and then *acts*. He proceeds thoughtfully and systematically. Diligence can effect little, unless accompanied with careful forethought; nothing worth while, and nothing permanent. The “*hasty*,” who act without consideration, who engage in rash projects, who are eager and sanguine in catching at every new thing, and in anticipating great results from little exertion,—can never thrive. Their hastily-conceived and ill-matured projects, are only the preludes to successive failures, disappointments, and ruin. And then—

2. Diligence means *steady perseverance* in execution. What avails any plan, how well and how maturely soever concerted, if it be not prosecuted with steadfast resolution? Neither "*plenteousness*," nor any truly good and valuable result, can reasonably be expected without this. The projects of the "hasty," who, while they begin in rashness, are easily disconcerted and prone to change, are never worked out to their perfection. But those of the attentive, plodding, persevering man, who begins in earnest, and goes on to the end in earnest, prepared for difficulties and impressed with the truth that nothing is to be attained without labour,—are the projects that promise to produce, and generally do produce, a favourable result.

Verse 6. "The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death." Diligence is a *right* road to "plenteousness:" here is a *wrong*—the "*lying tongue*;" on which rests the curse of God. And forget not what the "lying tongue" includes—that he is chargeable with the evil who pretends, in any way, to *be* what he *is not*, to *have* what he *has not*, *not* to have what he *has*, to *have* said what he has *not* said, or to have *done* what he has *not done*, or *not* to have said and done what he *has* said and done; who tries to gain an end by any word, or act, or look, or even by silence and concealment designed to convey a *false impression*—by any means whatever not in harmony with honest truth,—with "simplicity and godly sincerity." This, says Solomon, "is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death." It is a "*vanity*;" inasmuch as it involves both *folly* and *sin*:—the folly being made evident in ultimate detection, exposure, shame, and loss,—loss of character, loss of confidence, and many a time loss of even what the falsehood had acquired. It is "*tossed to and fro*." Men learn it from one another. The man who has been imposed upon retaliates; he has no satisfaction until he has succeeded in duping him by whom he has himself been taken in,—in practising on him an equal or a better trick. It is practised with little thought,—with the vanity of a light and inconsiderate mind, and laughed at, in many instances, when it

proves successful, instead of engendering remorse. Success produces a hundred imitators: and the cheats and the dupes are successively reversed,—the dupe becoming in his turn the cheat, and the cheat the dupe. And what is the final issue? They who follow such courses may try to make light of the evil; but they are “*seeking death*,”—acting as if bent on their own ruin—a ruin which shall inevitably come.*

Verse 7. “The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them; because they refuse to do judgment.” This verse is obviously and closely connected, not in position merely but in sentiment, with the *sixth*. The sixth relates to the “getting of treasures” by *deceit*, this to “the getting of treasures” by *violence*. The one speaks of *lies*, the other of *robbery*.

“The robbery of the wicked *shall destroy them*.” It does so, when detected by men, and brought under legal cognizance. They lose what they have got, and are punished besides. And then—“what shall they do when *God* riseth up?” The just Judge will convict and cast them out. They shall be “punished with *everlasting* destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.” Why?—“because they refuse to *do judgment*.” This is what in the *third* verse is represented as “*acceptable to the Lord*.” But they “*refuse*.” This supposes them commanded and warned. They are, both by the dictates of *conscience*, and by the authority of *God’s word*,—and in many cases too, by *His providence*. They resist every admonition; and thus bring their blood upon their own heads.†

Verse 8. “The way of man is froward and strange: but as for the pure, his work is right.” Between this verse and the *two preceding* there is an equally manifest connexion. The contrast appears somewhat singular—between “the way

* Stuart renders the verse—though “not confidently, for the passage is obscure”—“*By a lying tongue is there a winning of treasures; a fleeting breath are they who seek death*,” meaning—“they who use a lying tongue in order to acquire riches are such as seek their own death, for they shall be as a fleeting breath.” This is certainly not so *expressive* as the rendering of our English version.

Luther gives a still different rendering.

† See chap. i. 18, 19; 24—31.

of *man*” and the “work of *the pure*.” Yet the language is framed on the same principle with that of the apostle, when he says, “For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” 1 Cor. iii. 3. The phrase “*walk as men*,” is on the margin, “walk *according to man*.” The reference, in both cases, is to the natural and generic character of man as distinguished from that of the regenerate. “The way of *man*” is the way which he is naturally disposed to choose and to follow. It is “*strange*”—the way of an *alien*, of one estranged from God, and from holiness. It is “*froward*”—the way of self-will and rebellious insubordination.

Who, then, are “*the pure*?” The answer is—those who have been “renewed in the spirit of their minds;” in whom the divine promise has been verified, “A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.” All real purity in man is the effect of the word and Spirit of God. It is by this he is “washed and sanctified.” So it has been from the beginning; so it must be to the end.*

And what is the proof of inward purification?—“*His work is right*.” Here is the test. Where there is purity in the fountain, there will be purity in the streams; and from the streams we judge of the fountain.—“His work is *right*.” This relates to a standard. That standard is the character and the law of God. All is right there; and nothing is right in man that does not harmonize, in principle and act, with the revealed will of God. RECTITUDE IS CONFORMITY TO THAT WILL.

* John iii. 3—10.

LECTURE LXV.

PROV. XXI. 9—13.

“It is better to dwell in a corner of the house-top, than with a brawling woman in a wide house. The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes. When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise; and when the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge. The righteous man wisely considereth the house of the wicked: but God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness. Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.”

God said, when he had created Adam—“It is not good that the man should be alone.” In the first of these verses, Solomon affirms that there are cases in which it *is* good for the man to be alone. These are cases in which the gracious design of a kind and benevolent God is counteracted by the evil passions which, through sin, became the heritage of our fallen nature.

In eastern countries, as you are aware, the roofs of the houses were flat; and when solitude and quiet were specially courted,—as for meditation and prayer, for example,—the “*house-top*” was not seldom the resort. To “*dwell*,” however, on the “*house-top*,” and in “*a corner of the house-top*,” could be no very comfortable residence, especially at particular seasons of variable weather. But the spirit of the verse is—*anything* rather than the evil complained of; *any* place, rather than within the range of fretfulness, contention, and clamour.

The wife that answers to the description before us, violates at once the precepts of God’s law and the spirit of His

gospel; is a plague, where she ought to be a pleasure; a curse, where she ought to be a blessing;—embittering the fountains of enjoyment, where she ought to sweeten the springs of woe; converting into a scene of unceasing vexation and misery, what ought to be a concentration of the richest delights of earth; throwing venomous and hissing snakes into the circle of love and peace and concord, of fond hearts, and kind lips, and beaming eyes; and making her wretched husband long to find a speedy escape from that which ought to be the repose of his toils, the solace of his cares, the balm of his sorrows, the refreshment, the strength, and the joy of his heart! Such as know by experience the wretchedness described, will sympathise, through bitter fellow-feeling, with others who endure it; and they, on the contrary, who know the exquisite sweets of that domestic intercourse over which love presides, will pity from the bottom of their hearts the hapless victims of this most fearful scourge of social life.

But let us deal fairly. Solomon, I have formerly had occasion to remark, made a most unjust estimate of the female character. The experience from which, doubtless, he here speaks, was an experience greatly the result of his own folly and sin. His crowded seraglio was not the place for either finding, cherishing, or enjoying the real excellencies of woman. I am fully persuaded, that both the average of general character, and of connubial affection and faithfulness, are greatly on the female side.—A vast deal has been said, and not a little sung, about the miseries of the matrimonial alliance. But of nine-tenths of it what is the origin? Is it not lightness and perverseness in the choice of a partner,—in the formation of the union? Is it not, in innumerable instances, the case, that the most intimate, sacred, indissoluble of all connexions is formed with a levity and infatuation, that have hardly a parallel in any other human negotiations? Do we not see men many a time bestowing far more consideration on the qualities of a horse or a cow before they will venture to purchase, than on the qualities of a woman before they will venture to marry?—the qualities of an inseparable companion for life? How, in such cases, is happiness to be

looked for?—when men, ay and women too, act as if they not only said in jest but held in earnest, that the whole matter was no better than a lottery?—The man, moreover, who, regardless of the qualities of mind and heart, marries for mere personal appearance,—and still more and still worse, the man who looks only to the purse, and who thus prostitutes the finest and tenderest feelings of our nature, and vulgarizes the first and most endearing of all relations to a low, pitiful, sordid computation of pounds, shillings, and pence,—is not to be pitied, if in his fair or his wealthy spouse he find a termagant, and by bitter experience be taught the meaning and the truth of the verse before us; fleeing to the “house-top,” and there sighing out his wishes that he could resign beauty and wealth and all, to be free of the scourge of the tongue!

Verse 10. “The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes.” “*Desireth evil!*” What an amount of malignity do these words express! For the meaning does not seem to be that the wicked man desires the *sin* to which his corruption is prone. The latter clause of the verse leads us to interpret “*evil*” as meaning *evil to his neighbour*: the desire of which may spring from any of the various passions predominating in the bosom of “the wicked”—(all concentrated and summed up in *selfishness*)—avarice, ambition, lust, revenge. When any one of these predominates, or a combination of them sways the despotism of his heart,—“*his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes.*” Whenever “his neighbour” stands at all in the way of his own gratification,—of the acquisition of any object on which he has set his heart,—no consideration of his interest will be allowed for a moment to interpose an obstacle to its prosecution and attainment. SELF is his idol; SELFISHNESS his grand principle and impulse. He views “his neighbour” in no other light than as, on the one hand, the means of thwarting, or, on the other, the instrument of promoting his own ends. Can he gain any thing by him? he will flatter and cajole him, and do everything to win his favour, and secure his services. Does his “neighbour’s” interest, reputation, personal and family

comforts, connexions, or even life itself, stand in the way of the attainment of his wishes?—he is ready to sacrifice all to his idol. He will tempt and seduce him. He will defraud, rob, oppress, slander, or even kill him. A history of the operation of such passions as were before enumerated, given by the inspiration of Him who “knoweth what is in man,” would form a most appalling commentary on this verse.

There are excellent commentators, however, who interpret the “*desiring evil*” of the *love of sin* in general; and who consider the love of sin as engendering the selfishness which sets at nought the claims of neighbour and friend. This *may* be the meaning; and, in effect, it comes to much the same thing.

Let *us*, my brethren, hate sin, and strive against the selfishness which the love of sin engenders, and which is one of the characteristics of “*the wicked*.” There is, remember, an important distinction between *disposition or inclination*, and *conscience*. They are often at variance. It is by the former, not by the latter, that *character* is formed and distinguished. The most wicked of men may in his conscience disapprove what, following the bent of his inclination, he does. Even when he “works all uncleanness with greediness,”—even when he pursues the gratification of his avarice or his ambition at the expense of every principle of equity and benevolence, and regard to the interests of others, he may be very far from having *conscience* on his side. But the main difference between him and the good man is, that while *he* compels conscience to yield to inclination, the other brings inclination into conformity with conscience—“crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts;” and, instead of selfishly setting aside the claims and rights and necessities of others for his own gratification, seeks his own pleasure in promoting the well-being of all around him. All his neighbours *find favour in his eyes*.

Verse 11. “When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise; and when the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge.”* The “*scorner*,” as we have frequently had oc-

* Comp. chap. xix. 25.

casion to remark, is the man who laughs at all principle and restraint; who "makes a mock at sin," and sets at defiance all authority. As "the simple"—he who is inexperienced, inconsiderate, thoughtless,—when he "sees the prosperity" of such an one, is in danger of giving way to the rising emotions of envy, and,—stumbled by the mystery which his very simplicity makes him at a loss to explain,—of seeking to imitate;—so when such an one is punished,—when the scorner's high-minded contempt of God and goodness is thus visited and rebuked,—when the true and proper tendency of the course he follows is thus made manifest,—the simple is struck; consideration is forced upon him; he is led to look to the *end* of such courses; he "foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself;" he betakes himself to a wiser and a better way,—repenting and turning unto God; he *is made wise*, by learning to "fear God, and depart from evil."

In the latter part of the verse, what is the antecedent to the pronoun *he*? Is it "*the wise*?" It may be; and the statement holds true. "*The wise*" improves under "instruction." "*He receiveth knowledge*." Instruction is not lost upon him. But I am inclined to regard "*the simple*" as the real antecedent; the meaning being, that from the "instruction of the wise," as well as from "the punishment of the scorner," "the simple" is enlightened and profited. The docility of "the wise"—the humble and earnest manner in which he is seen to receive the lessons of divine teaching,—tends, as does the view of the sad results of the scorner's hardihood, to impress the mind of "the simple" with a sense of the folly of his own inconsiderate thoughtlessness.

Let us learn the lesson of imitating in the latter case, and being on our guard in the other. If we see "the wise receiving knowledge," and see the effects of that knowledge in the propriety, consistency, and dignity of their conduct, in the influence, respect, and real substantial good of which it is productive;—and when, on the contrary, we see the unprincipled "scorner" reaping even here the bitter fruits of his madness, and look forward to the end, when these fruits will be reaped in their full amount of righteous inflictions,

tion,—let us “stand in awe and sin not;” let us leave to himself “the seat of the scorner,” “the way of the sinner,” and “the counsel of the ungodly.”

Verse 12. “The righteous man wisely considereth the house of the wicked: but God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness.” The *supplement* in this verse is evidently a very violent one. It is not easy to conceive the writer omitting to express the words that are here inserted,—if he really intended them to be understood. I refer to the words “*but God.*” I cannot imagine a more unlikely ellipsis. Some critics regard the verse as having undergone some little corruption in the original, and they venture to alter accordingly. But conjectural criticism is hazardous; and it must be a case of very hard necessity indeed that can justify having recourse to it. And at the same time the insertion of supplementary words requires hardly less caution and reserve. Observe, then:—First, the word rendered here “*wisely considereth,*” is the same verb which, in the preceding verse, is translated “*is instructed;*” and to instruct, to give instruction, is its most common acceptation. Farther, the verb translated “*overthroweth,*” means also “*to turn aside*”—generally in the sense of *perverting*, or turning from *good*, but not necessarily.

On such grounds, the verse has been translated by Dr. Boothroyd (and, although not in every point satisfied, I acquiesce in the rendering as the best,) “The righteous man teacheth, or gives instruction to, the house of the wicked, to turn away the wicked from evil.” A forced and unnatural supplement is thus avoided; and the difficulties, in a simply critical view, are at least greatly lessened. In the Vulgate Latin version, the same turn is given to the second part of the verse;—“The just man thinks maturely concerning the house of the wicked, that he may draw away the wicked from evil.”

And the practical sentiment thus brought out is one of the greatest importance. In the phrase “the house, or family of the wicked,” the word *wicked* is in the singular number,—“the house of the *wicked man.*”—in the latter part

of the verse, "that he may turn away *the wicked* from evil," *wicked* is plural, and may be considered as referring to the members of his household along with himself. The righteous man is deeply sensible that the family of the wicked are in danger of "perishing for lack of knowledge." Who is to instruct them? He looks upon such families with melting compassion; and his compassion, like that of God, and like that of Christ, is practical. He seeks opportunities of communicating instruction; and the nature of the instruction appears from the nature of the design—"that he may turn away *the wicked* from evil."*

Verse 13. "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard." In illustration of these striking and alarming words, observe—*First*: we may always expect, both in general society and in the church of God, "the rich and the poor to meet together." "The poor shall never cease out of the land," said God to Moses. "The poor ye have always with you," said Jesus to his disciples. The distinction has existed from the beginning hitherto. Wherever there has been property, it has been in various portions; and were there an equal partition of property to-day, there would be a difference to-morrow—a difference arising from diversity of character, as well as from the incessant influence of changing events. On the very day of equalization ten thousand incidents, over which men themselves could exert no control, even independently of the operation of avarice, and prodigality, and fancy, and whim, and caprice, would produce ten thousand changes.—There are varieties of poverty; for poverty is a relative and comparative term. And among the indigent and dependent poor there are also varieties:—the industrious

* Stuart renders the verse—"The Righteous One taketh cognizance of the house of the wicked; he will cast the wicked headlong into evil." Of the verb in the second clause he says—"A very strong word, to precipitate, to cast down headlong." Thus our translators have "*overthrow*;" and such would certainly seem to be the *usual* sense of the term. Luther's rendering of the former part of the verse is much the same as that of the English version; the latter he renders, "*but the wicked think only to do mischief*"—on what authority it is hard to say.

and the indolent; the sober and the intemperate; the virtuous and the vicious; the deserving and the undeserving. Hence, *secondly*, nothing can be of greater consequence than marking this distinction, and regulating our charity accordingly. The verse cannot mean, that by an indiscriminate distribution of alms, we should hold out an encouragement to laziness, or a bounty to thriftless and unprincipled profligacy—the beggary of the idle and the wicked. There is a “*stopping of the ears*” that is at times a virtue,—requiring an effort of self-denying principle, in opposition to the mere emotion and impulse of present pity. There are some who are worthless vagrants; there are others who are not really needy, but impostors on public benevolence. If we have the slightest ground to suspect either, it is but right to “stop the ear” till we know the case. Charity must be exercised *judiciously*. If it is not, we may greatly aggravate the evil it is our design to alleviate: and faithfulness to the stewardship with which God invests every man on whom he bestows the means of doing good, requires of him the use of discretion—the application of judgment, as well as the indulgence of feeling.—*Thirdly*, the *sin* here reprovèd is an unmerciful disposition; unfeeling hardness of heart; pitiless, avaricious, griping selfishness. Now, in many ways this selfishness may be exemplified. For instance, in the unreasonable beating down of the wages of the poor labourer and artisan; for true as it is that wages must be regulated by the state of supply and demand, yet there is, at times, to be seen a readiness to take advantage of circumstances beyond what they justly warrant, and, for the sake of a little extra profit, to grind the faces of the poor by screwing down the remuneration of their labour to the very starving point;—and, when they naturally and earnestly lift the voice of complaint and remonstrance, “stopping the ear at their cry.” There is, again, the denial of protection to the poor, when it is pleaded for against oppression, and when we have it at all in our power to afford it. There is, still further, the selfish, ruthless disregard of the applications of the poor in their times of want and suffering,—the heartless re-

fusal to hear them,—to be troubled with their representations and complainings,—some excuse being ever found or devised for declining to listen to or relieve them. This is a fearful violation of the great law of righteousness and love. Once more, there is a *public* “stopping of the ear at the cry of the poor,” in times of prevailing destitution and distress, which, we cannot but feel, must awaken divine indignation against the Government and the country in which it prevails. It is the duty of every Government to deal equally with all classes of the community; and it becomes the duty of all the subjects of that Government to do what lies constitutionally in their power, to obtain the adoption of such measures as are fitted, without doing injustice to others, to provide most effectually, extensively, and permanently, for the wants of the unemployed and the destitute.

The saying of the verse is often verified *amongst men*. The avaricious and unmerciful, when they are themselves brought low and into straits, meet with little commiseration. As they meted, it is meted to them. If any thing is given them, it is with a grudge and stintedly. Heart and hand are closed against them; and the ear of generous kindness is turned away from their complainings. And in *divine* retribution, the saying is invariably and infallibly true. The poor were the objects of the special compassion and care of the merciful Saviour. His churches should resemble Him in this. It will fare ill with churches, as well as individuals, if they “stop their ear at the cry of the poor.” It is one of the marks of a church’s spiritual prosperity, and augurs the favour and blessing of their Lord, when the poor are kindly and liberally cared for.*

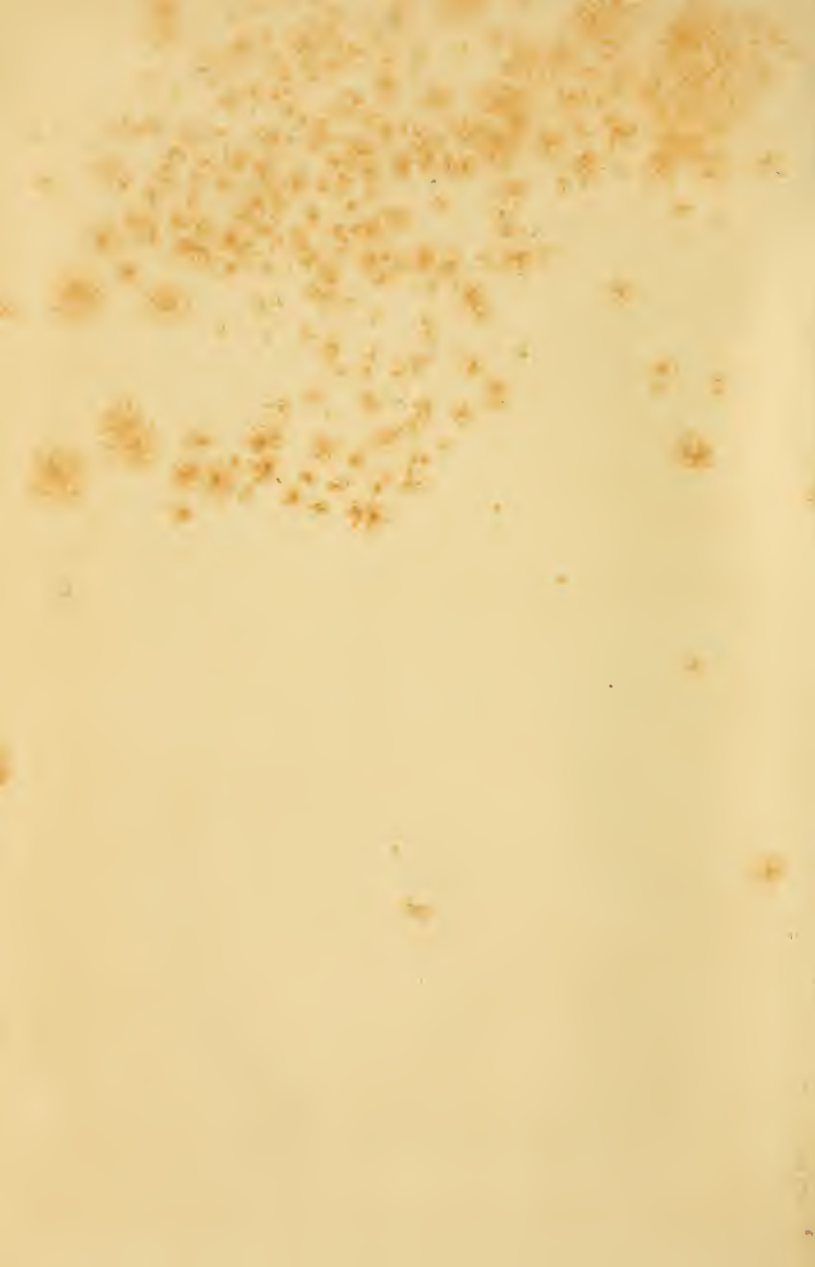
* See 2 Cor. ix. 6—11.

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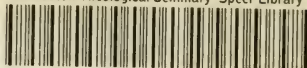
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